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Mute Swan, Aboyne,
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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

Annual membership rates*

Adult (aged 18 and over)	£	36.00
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Rates valid until end of August 2019 (†31 December 2019), subject to change thereafter.

For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk

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Supporting birding, bird recording and science

On 10 March I was returning from the Council meeting at Loch Leven and stopped to listen to Jane Allison giving a superb BBC *Out of Doors* interview about the launch of SOC's new *Where to Watch Birds in Scotland* mobile app, of which more below. Immediately afterwards, however, came a disturbing report of fire at the Fair Isle Bird Observatory, and soon came sad confirmation that the observatory buildings had been destroyed. Fortunately, no-one was hurt and the Observatory's wealth of bird data were backed up and safe. We have of course offered the Club's assistance to the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust whenever that may be needed and the almost £1,000 raised by the spring Birdwatchers' Conference in Oban the following weekend was a further, heart-warming statement of support.

Already, the Observatory's Directors have indicated their wish to continue with as much census and research work as possible in the circumstances, and their extraordinary resilience and determination gives me cause to reflect on the crucial importance of the Club's own support for birding, bird recording and science. In this regard, I am delighted to report that at its March meeting, Council established a new Birding and Science Committee, bringing together representatives of several existing committees. It will report to Council and be devoted to further developing and promoting the birding, scientific and conservation interests of the Club. I would be delighted to hear from any members with ideas that the new Committee might consider (email: vicepresident_birding@the-soc.org.uk). However, of course there is much already to be proud of, and I'd like to celebrate two recent achievements which are a testament to the continuing energy and commitment of the birdwatching community across Scotland.

First, in February, we welcomed the publication by SOC of *Birds in South-east Scotland 2007-13, a tetrad atlas of Lothian and Borders* which has compiled close to half a million bird records, collected by over 850 observers over 32,000 hours of fieldwork effort at all seasons and in all weathers. A treasury of information about the changing fortunes of breeding and wintering bird populations in south-east Scotland and richly and beautifully illustrated throughout, the Atlas is dedicated to the memory of its lead author Ray Murray, one of the project's driving forces, and huge credit is also due to Ian Andrews, Mark Holling and their team of co-authors for bringing the work to fruition.

Secondly, the SOC now has its *Where to Watch Birds in Scotland* mobile app. This remarkable new resource offers an introduction to the best birding sites across Scotland (and more sites are being added all the time!), and best of all it offers links to BirdTrack to allow users to see recent records and encourage them to submit their own records from the sites they visit. The app has been a labour of love for the project team — Jane Allison, Martin Cook and Alan Knox — as well as a network of around 140 local co-ordinators and site contributors for whose hard work I am immensely grateful. Thanks also go to the Birds of Scotland Fund and the Glasgow Natural History Society for their generous support.

So, enjoy your birding, but enjoy it even more knowing that every record sent to your local Bird Recorder, to BirdTrack, or to the survey scheme to which you are contributing, adds to our understanding of Scotland's birds and makes possible remarkable collaborative projects like these.

Jeremy Wilson, SOC Vice-President, Birding & Science

Plate 77. White-billed Diver, adult, North/South Wick, Papa Westray, Orkney, 6–30 April 2017. © *David Roche*

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2017

C.J. MCINERNY & R.Y. MCGOWAN
on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

This is the tenth annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), describing rare birds recorded in Scotland during 2017. Details of previous annual reports that cover the period 2005 to 2016 can be found in McGowan & McInerny (2018), some which are cited in this report.

A summary of the rare bird species considered by SBRC, the SBRC List, and other committees is given in Appendix 2, and is shown at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

Recent changes to the SBRC List include, from 1 January 2017, the removal of Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca,* Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* and Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, with Ferruginous Duck records now considered by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) and Egyptian Goose and Glossy Ibis records assessed by local Scottish committees. Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* remains on the SBRC List but with records assessed by local committees on Shetland and Fair Isle. In contrast, both Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* and Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* were added to the SBRC List, being no longer considered by BBRC.

Furthermore, from 1 January 2019, White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* was removed from the SBRC List, with records now assessed by local Scottish committees. Additionally, all records of Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* and Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni* are to be considered by BBRC, and Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* and Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* were added to the SBRC List, being no longer assessed by BBRC.

During 2017, the most striking observations of rare birds were the highest Scottish annual totals of Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator.* In the case of Cattle Egret this reflects the large numbers colonising England in the past few years, with breeding now recorded, which follows the trend of Little Egret *Egretta garzetta,* also colonising the UK in recent times. As with Little Egret, it is likely that more Cattle Egrets will be seen in Scotland in the future. The 27 Arctic Redpolls and 75 Little Buntings *Emberiza pusilla* were the second highest Scottish annual totals. In contrast, a number of species, such as Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* and Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* were not observed in Scotland during 2017.

Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format, which is modelled on the annual BBRC reports published in *British Birds*. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the latest version of the *Scottish List*, which follows the 9th Edition of the British List (BOU 2018a, Forrester 2018).

On the header line, after the species or subspecies name, are three numbers:

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007), with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases, older records, 'At Sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004, but excluding the current year.
- Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted.
- Total number in the current year (2017).

Occasionally, adjustments to totals have been made to take account of late retrospective acceptances by local committees, or when corrections are detected from Excel spreadsheet totals.

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2017, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2017 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years can be accepted by Local Recorders without submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided in this report. Revised and/or corrected details are also provided for some pre-2017 records, published previously.

For each record listed in full, the following information is provided:

- Year
- Recording area www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present throughout; in some cases, it may have been observed only on the first and last dates given.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.
- Use of DNA analysis to aid identification.
- Existence of a photograph or video, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited: if the submitter was the Local Recorder this is shown as '*per* Local Recorder'. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'.
- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen accession number if available.

- Additional sightings of the same bird at a different location, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, Local Recorder and/or others.

The table of records is followed by the main text of the species account. At the end of each account, a brief summary of global breeding and wintering distribution, with mention of relevant subspecies to Scotland, is given in parentheses.

Species coverage

Species coverage is unchanged from the last report. Rare subspecies of several species on the SBRC List are still assessed by BBRC, the most important being Subalpine Warbler and Arctic Redpoll. For these, the accounts in the SBRC report summarise accepted BBRC records in order to give as complete a picture as possible of the species' occurrence in Scotland.

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the taxa on the SBRC List each year for the period 2015–19. Appendix 3 lists corrections to previous SBRC reports.

SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) Council. Its role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Current members are Mark Wilkinson (Chairman), Jim Dickson, David Parnaby, Dave Pullan, Martin Scott, David Steel (replacing John Nadin in 2018), and Mark Warren. Chris McInerny is non-voting Secretary and Bob McGowan is non-voting Museum Consultant. For more information about SBRC, see www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/about-sbrc.

Records accepted by SBRC are published on the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/recent-decisions as soon as they are processed, and thereafter in annual reports, such as this, published in *Scottish Birds*. The accepted record details are also added to Excel spreadsheets which list all records for SBRC species. These Excel spreadsheets display the data chronologically, by recording areas, and graphically. Examples of the graphs have been used in SBRC reports published in *Scottish Birds*. The Excel files are archived at the Waterston Library, SOC Headquarters, Aberlady www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/library. They may be consulted on request, and we encourage interested parties to use this resource, which is a convenient way to access and interrogate SBRC records. In the future, we plan to place the Excel spreadsheets on the SOC website to make them more widely available.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we are grateful to all observers who submitted records of Scottish rarities to Local Recorders and SBRC during the period. Without their efforts to find and record these birds, this report could not exist. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to those who gave permission for their excellent photographs to be reproduced here.

Next, we thank the following current and former Local Recorders for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Yvonne Benting, Paul Collin, Martin Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain English, Rob Fray, Nick Littlewood, Sinclair Mason, Russell Neave, David Parkinson, David Parnaby, Scott Patterson, Chris Pendlebury, Graham Sparshott, Peter Stronach, Stephen Welch, and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas included in this report.

We appreciate Keith Naylor's scrutiny of past SBRC reports, and thank him for his continuing valuable contribution.

Systematic list of accepted records

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*
19 (of 23 birds): 51: 1

Table 1. Accepted records of Lesser Scaup in Scotland, 2017.

2017: **North-east Scotland** Loch of Skene, adult, male, 23–24 May photo (H. Addlesee *et al.*).
Orkney Loch of Boardhouse, Birsay, Mainland, adult, male, 1 January to 24 April, photo, same as 2016 (McGowan & McInerny 2018).

Lesser Scaup is a rare though increasing visitor to Scotland, since the first in 1990, with observations throughout the country. Most records have been of singles, although multiples, including a group of three, have been observed. A number of individuals have remained for extended periods, sometimes moving between sites, and have returned in following years.

(Breeds in North America from Alaska to Ontario and south to California, Colorado and Minnesota. Most migrate to winter from USA south to Central America, the Caribbean and Hawaiian Islands, but smaller numbers regularly move eastwards to winter in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.)

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*
194: 284: 25

Table 2. Accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2017, with additional records for 2016.

2017: **Borders** Eyemouth, first-calendar-year, 10 November (C. Hartley).
Isle of May 6 November (D. Steel).
Lothian Ferny Ness, second-calendar-year, 8 February to 1 March, photo (K. Gibb, M.D. Hodgkin, N. MacIver *et al.*).
Highland Sandwood Bay, Sutherland, 12 February (S. Jacques).
Moray & Nairn Cullen, 23 March, 6 May, photo (D. Pullan).
Moray & Nairn Burghead, third-calendar-year or older, 2 April (P.R. Gordon).
Moray & Nairn Lossiemouth, adult, 22–23 April, 16 May (R. Proctor *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Fraserburgh, 19 November, photo (M. Keighley, N. Littlewood).
Orkney Water Sound & Burray, South Ronaldsay, adult, returning, 4 January to 31 May, same as 2016 (McGowan & McInerny 2017); same 10–25 December (C. Hall *et al.*).
Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 2–11 February (S.Z. Perfect *et al.*).
Orkney North/South Wick, Papa Westray, adult, 6–30 April, photo (D. Roche *et al.*); same Pierowall Bay, Westray, 24 May, photo (S.J. Davies).
Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 17 April (S.J. Davies).
Orkney Tor Ness, North Ronaldsay, two, adults, 8–12 May (S.Z. Perfect *et al.*).
Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, adult, 19 May (E. Taylor).
Orkney Rives Geo, Sanday, second-calendar-year, 24 May, photo (E. Neave-Webb *et al.*).
Orkney South Wick, Papa Westray, second-calendar-year, 1 June (A.J. Leitch *et al.*).
Orkney Houton Head, Orphir, Mainland, adult, photo, 2 November to 2018 (S. Pinder *et al.*).
Orkney Mull Head, Papa Westray, 6 November, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).
Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, adult, 29 November (S.J. Davies *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Eòlaigearraidh (Eoligarry), Barraigh (Barra), adult, 27 March to 4 May, photo (M. Oksien, B. Taylor, K. Taylor).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), Uibhist a Deas (South Uist), second-calendar-year, 10 May, photo (B.S. Barnacal, K. Evans, J.B. Kemp).
Shetland South Nesting Bay, adult, returning, 23 January to 10 May (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).
Shetland Bluemull Sound, adult, returning, 26 April, photo (*per* Local Recorder).
Shetland Flubersgerdie, Unst, adult, 28 April, photo (D. Cooper).
Shetland Flubersgerdie, Unst, adult (different from 28 April), 5 May (D. Cooper).
Shetland Mousa Sound, 31 August to 2 September, photo (K. Milsom *et al.*).
Shetland Bluemull Sound, first-calendar-year, 7 November (B.H. Thomason).
Shetland South Nesting Bay, adult, returning, 13 November, photo (W.T.S. Miles).

2016: **Orkney** Mull Head, Papa Westray, 1 November, photo (J. Branscombe).
Orkney Water Sound & Burray, South Ronaldsay, adult, returning, same as 2015 (McGowan & McInerny 2017) to 2 May.

Plate 78. White-billed Diver, Fraserburgh, North-east Scotland, 19 November 2017. © *Mark Keighley*

White-billed Diver is a scarce though regular visitor to Scotland, with up to 30 being reported each year. Most occur in spring at a number of favoured localities in the Outer Hebrides, Moray & Nairn and North-east Scotland where birds stop-over to moult before moving to summer breeding areas in the high Arctic. In Shetland and Orkney, a few wintering individuals return to the same sites in successive years, and a very small numbers of immature, non-breeding birds have been observed during the summer.

There may be some overlap among Scottish records given the species' mobility. It also seems likely that some of the spring birds return to use the same stop-over sites each year. As it impossible to distinguish these and they are registered as new birds, SBRC total numbers are probably inflated.

Records of White-billed Diver from 1 January 2019 will not be assessed by SBRC, but instead by local committees (Appendix 2).

(Breeds in parts of Arctic Russia, Alaska and Arctic Canada; winters on the Pacific coasts of Russia and Canada, and along the Atlantic coast of Norway and in the North Atlantic.)

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*
c. 228: 29: 3

Table 3. Accepted records of Cory's Shearwater in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Fife** Fife Ness, 23 August (B. Farquharson, R. Shand). **North-east Scotland** Girdle Ness, 23 August (M. Lewis). **Outer Hebrides** The Minch, from the car ferry between Steòrnabhagh (Stornoway) and Ullapool, 21 July, photo (T. Mainwood, M. Warren *et al.*).

Cory's Shearwater is a rare visitor to Scottish waters, recorded near-annually, with most seen off North Ronaldsay and the Outer Hebrides during the late summer and early autumn. A very few enter the North Sea where they are observed moving along the east coast. Although an increase in sightings from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s occurred, numbers since have decreased, with about two or less seen annually, although none were observed in 2010, 2012 and 2015.

Plate 79. Cory's Shearwater, The Minch, Outer Hebrides, 21 July 2017. © *Tony Mainwood*

The Outer Hebrides bird was unusual both for its early date in July, but also because it was seen closely from the car ferry which allowed photographs to be taken (Plate 79). Very few photographic images exist of Cory's Shearwater in Scotland; hence a drawing was used in the species' account in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

(Breeds on the Azores, Canary Islands and other nearby Atlantic islands, with the closely related Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea* breeding in the Mediterranean. Both species occur in North Atlantic waters in autumn and are on the British List, but most are assumed to be Cory's, with Scopoli's not yet recorded in Scottish waters.)

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*
c. 522 (1950–2004): 9,223: 4 (excluding 'At Sea' records)

Table 4. Accepted records of Great Shearwater in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Orkney** Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 31 August, photo (A.F. McNee, S.Z. Perfect, A.C. Williams). **Orkney** Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 1 September (A.F. McNee, S.Z. Perfect). **Orkney** Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 10 September (S.Z. Perfect). **Outer Hebrides** Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), Uibhist a Deas (South Uist), 27 July, photo (J.B. Kemp).

Great Shearwater was rarely seen in Scotland until many were observed during 2005–07. Since then, however, no more than six have been recorded in any one year, if 'At Sea' records are discounted. This underlines the exceptional nature of the influxes witnessed during 2005–07.

The species is a late summer and autumn visitor, with most sightings from North Ronaldsay, Orkney, and a few from the Outer Hebrides and along the east coast of mainland Scotland. Three of the 2017 records fit this pattern, and follow the typical North Ronaldsay observation of birds flying west past Dennis Head at the north end of the island. These are thought to be returning to the North Atlantic, having previously entered the North Sea, probably after westerly gales.

(Breeds on South Atlantic islands and carries out a clockwise loop migration in the North Atlantic outside the breeding season. In the north-east Atlantic occurs most regularly off the south-west coast of Ireland in late summer and autumn.)

Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
46: 14: 2

Table 5. Accepted records of Night-heron in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Outer Hebrides** Gleann & Gearraidh Gadhal (Garrygall), Barraigh (Barra), second-calendar-year, 25 April to 13 May, photo (B.A. Taylor *et al.*).
	Outer Hebrides Gleann & Gearraidh Gadhal (Garrygall), Barraigh (Barra), third-calendar-year, 25–28 April, photo (B.A. Taylor *et al.*).

Night-heron is a less-than-annual visitor to Scotland, with a spring peak in observations. There is a wide geographical spread, but most are seen in the Northern Isles and the Outer Hebrides.

This is first instance of two Night-herons seen together in Scotland since 1822, when a pair was shot at the Hirsel, Borders on 25 May, the first Scottish record (Forrester *et al.* 2007); although two were present on Fair Isle in April 2008, they were separate (Breaks 2009, ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a). Both 2017 birds were sub-adults, though one was a year older than the other (Plates 80–81).

Plate 80. Night-heron, second-calendar-year, Gleann & Gearraidh Gadhal (Garrygall), Barraigh (Barra), Outer Hebrides, 25 April to 13 May 2017. © *Bruce Taylor*

Plate 81. Night-heron, third-calendar-year, Gleann & Gearraidh Gadhal (Garrygall), Barraigh (Barra), Outer Hebrides, 25–28 April 2017. © *Bruce Taylor*

Plate 82. Cattle Egret, Trochry, Strathbraan, Perth & Kinross, 28 September 2017. © *Andrew Whewell*

(Holarctic with four subspecies. Nominate *nycticorax* breeding in mainland Europe and into Asia, with another subspecies in North America. Populations move south in winter.)

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
3: 10: 5

Table 6. Accepted records of Cattle Egret in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Dumfries & Galloway** Auchneel Farm, Stranraer, 29 January to 16 March, photo (B.D. Henderson *et al.*) (Henderson 2017).
	Dumfries & Galloway Culmore Farm, Sandhead, 8 November, 6 December, photo (B.D. Henderson).
	Fife West Fife (site confidential), 'first week' in November to 12 December, photo (*per* Local Recorder).
	Lothian Musselburgh lagoons, first-calendar-year, 26 September, photo (D. Allan *et al.*); same Prora, 29–30 September, photo (C.N. Davison *et al.*).
	Perth & Kinross Trochry, Strathbraan, 28 September, photo (J. & S. Pritchard, A. Whewell *et al.*).

Cattle Egret remains very rare in Scotland, although more are being found. This reflects the large increase in numbers seen in England, where over 200 appeared in 2007, with the species first breeding in 2008; a second influx occurred in 2016, resulting in breeding again in 2017, and flocks of 51 and 87 observed in Devon and Somerset during 2018 (BTO 2018).

The five in Scotland during 2017 is the highest annual total, although it is possible that some of the observations relate to the same individuals. For example, the Lothian and Perth & Kinross birds may have been the same; while the Dumfries & Galloway individual first seen from January to March (Henderson 2017), possibly returned the following November.

(Occurs widely in sub-tropical and temperate areas throughout the world, the European population being centred on the Mediterranean, extending north to central and western France, with increasing numbers of records farther north. Generally, a short-distance migrant.)

Plate 83. Cattle Egret, Prora, Lothian, 29–30 September 2017. © *Ian Andrews*

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
22: 4: 1

Table 7. Accepted record of Purple Heron in Scotland, 2017.

2017: **Lothian** Scoughall, 14 April (C.N. Davison).

Purple Heron is a very rare visitor to Scotland, with a peak of sightings in May and June likely reflecting spring overshoots from the continental Europe, and the majority of the remainder occurring in September and October being dispersing juveniles.

The species was last seen in Scotland during 2011 when four singles were observed in Fife, Moray & Nairn, Outer Hebrides and Shetland, all within the period 10–25 April (McGowan *et al.* 2013, McGowan & McInerny 2015). Thus the 2017 record falls within this more recent pattern of April occurrence.

(Breeds from Western Europe across to south-east Asia, and also in sub-Saharan Africa, where Western Palearctic populations winter. These populations belong to the nominate subspecies *purpurea*, with two other subspecies breeding in Madagascar and the eastern part of the range, respectively.)

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
45: 4: 1 (excluding young from known Scottish nests)

Table 8. Accepted record of Montagu's Harrier in Scotland, 2017.

2017: **Shetland** Boddam, Sumburgh & Brow Marsh, Mainland, third-calendar-year or older, female, 14 May, photo (G.F. Bell, P.A. Harris, P.V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*).

Montagu's Harrier is a very rare migrant to Scotland, with the few records mostly in spring along the east side of the country from Borders to Shetland. A few breeding attempts have been successful, though none since 1955, and the total of 49 birds to the end of 2016 excludes fledged young from these breeding attempts.

This was the first Montagu's Harrier seen in Scotland since 2014 (McGowan & McInerny 2016), and only the third for Shetland. The species remains very rare, and has been seen by just a few lucky observers, as all recent sightings have been of brief fly-throughs. A lingering bird in a convenient location would be appreciated by many Scottish ornithologists.

(Breeds from North Africa, Iberia, England and Sweden across continental Europe and central Asia to Yenisei River; winters in African savannas and on the Indian subcontinent.)

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
19: 30: 2

Table 9. Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2017, with an additional record for 2012.

2017: **Lothian** Bruntsfield, Edinburgh, 28 April (T. Dougall).
Highland Strath Fleet, near Loch Craggie, Sutherland, adult, 23 May (P. Clarke, B. Etheridge, P. Rowntree *et al.*).

2012: **Caithness** Scoolary, adult, 19 June (C. Laurie, J. Smith, R. Whytock).

Black Kite is a very rare visitor to Scotland from continental Europe. Most have been seen in spring, from April to June, with far fewer sightings in summer and autumn. There have also been instances of summering, and a single case of hybridisation with Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. Occurrences have increased in recent years; there were 30 during 2007–2017, following just nine in the period 1997–2006.

Plate 84. Montagu's Harrier, third-calendar-year or older, female, Sumburgh & Brow Marsh, Mainland, Shetland, 14 May 2017. © *Roger Riddington*

The Edinburgh bird was seen by the observer from his living room window, after he was alerted by the alarm calls of gulls. Fortunately, he located his binoculars quickly, as it was on view for less than two minutes.

The Caithness sighting was the first in that recording area.

(Nominate *migrans* breeds throughout most of Europe except the far north; winters in sub-Saharan Africa. Other subspecies elsewhere in the Old World.)

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
69: 87: 4

Table 10. Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2017, with an additional record for 2016.

2017:	**Outer Hebrides** Baile Sear, Uibhist a Tuath (North Uist), adult, 29–30 July, photo (B. Rabbitts *et al.*).
	Outer Hebrides Àird an Rùnair, Uibhist a Tuath (North Uist), adult, 2–3 August, photo (J. Farooqi *et al.*).
	Outer Hebrides Àird an Rùnair, Uibhist a Tuath (North Uist), first-calendar-year, 5 October, photo (B. Rabbitts).
	Outer Hebrides Baile Gharbhaidh, Uibhist a Deas (South Uist), first-calendar-year, 7–9 October, photo (*per* Local Recorder).
2016:	**North-east Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, adult, 21–25 July, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).

White-rumped Sandpiper is a scarce but annual visitor to Scotland from North America, with most observations in late summer and autumn on the Outer Hebrides. The four records during 2017 fit this pattern.

(Breeds in North America at high latitudes, migrating to winter in Brazil, Argentina and Chile.)

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*
0: 9: 1

Table 11. Accepted record of Caspian Gull in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Lothian** Skateraw, adult, 7–17 March, photo (C. Scott *et al.*).

Caspian Gull is extremely rare in Scotland. Occurrences have been from late autumn to spring. Most observations (70% to date) have been in coastal East Lothian, amongst flocks of gulls.

It is now known that a regular movement of the species takes place each year through England, with most observations in the south and east. The majority are immatures present in summer and autumn having moved west from their Eastern European breeding areas. However, Caspian Gull remains very rare elsewhere in the UK. Under-recording of this difficult-to-identify species is also likely, especially immatures (McInerny 2010).

(Breeds at inland lakes in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, wintering mostly in the eastern Mediterranean, but with smaller numbers reaching western maritime Europe.)

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
12: 24: 1

Table 12. Accepted record of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Clyde** Balgray Reservoir, second-calendar-year/third-calendar-year, 22 November to 2018, photo (J.J. Sweeney).

Yellow-legged Gull is very rare in Scotland, found throughout the country, usually in groups of other large white-headed gulls, often Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus*. Birds have been found at all times of the year, sometimes remaining for extended periods, with a number of individuals returning to the same locations in consecutive years. However, this species it probably under-recorded being challenging to identify, particularly immatures.

It seems likely that most if not all records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland refer to the nominate subspecies *L. m. michahellis*, which has a Mediterranean and south-west European distribution, including England (McInerny 2009).

However, observers should be aware that one record in Scotland of Yellow-legged Gull of the subspecies *L. m. atlantis* has been accepted

recently by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) and BBRC, as the first for Britain (Stoddart & McInerny 2017; BOU 2018b). This bird, a near-adult, was present at Baile na Creige, Barraigh (Craigston, Barra), Outer Hebrides on 10 September 2005. All potential records of this taxon, which breeds on the Atlantic Islands of the Azores, Madeira and Canaries, should be sent to BBRC (Appendix 2).

The presence of vagrant Yellow-legged Gulls in Scotland with Lesser Black-backed Gulls can be explained by the latter acting as a 'carrier species'; the two species are very closely related taxonomically, and are known to hybridize (Olsen & Larsson 2004). Importantly, Lesser Black-backed Gulls move between North Africa and Scotland for their breeding and non-breeding ranges, with Yellow-legged Gulls occasionally joining migrating flocks. Furthermore, increasing numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls remain to winter in Scotland, accounting for the Scottish winter records of Yellow-legged Gulls.

(Nominate *michahellis* breeds mainly from south-west Europe east to the Black Sea, with immatures dispersing widely in winter as far north as Britain and the Baltic. *L. m. atlantis* breeds on the Azores, Madeira and Canaries, wandering south to north-west Africa.)

Plate 85. White-winged Black Tern, adult, Loch Mòr & Loch a' Chinn Uacraich ('Coot Loch'), Beinn na Faoghla (Benbecula), 19 June 2017. © *Ian Thompson*

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
59: 20: 3

Table 13. Accepted records of White-winged Black Tern in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Orkney** Ancum Loch, North Ronaldsay, adult, 9–18 July, photo (S.Z. Perfect *et al.*); same **Fair Isle** Buness, 21 July, photo (R. Cope *et al.*); same **Orkney** Ancum Loch, North Ronaldsay, 1–19 August. **Outer Hebrides** Loch Mòr & Loch a' Chinn Uacraich ('Coot Loch'), Beinn na Faoghla (Benbecula), adult, 19 June, photo (G. Chiancianesi, I.R. Thompson *et al.*). **Outer Hebrides** Seilebost, Na Hearadh (Harris), adult, 14–19 July, photo (R. Wemyss *et al.*).

White-winged Black Tern is a rare visitor to Scotland, mostly observed along the east side of the country and on islands between late spring and late autumn.

The North Ronaldsay and Fair Isle bird remained for an extended period, moving back and forth between the two islands. Two were seen on the Outer Hebrides during 2017; eight birds have now been seen in this recording area since 2000, with only two before.

(Breeds on marshy lakes in central and Eastern Palearctic areas, migrating south to winter in Africa, Australasia and the Indian subcontinent.)

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*
34: 8: 1

Table 14. Accepted record of Alpine Swift in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Clyde** Baron's Haugh, Motherwell, 16–21 March, photo (North Ayrshire RSPB *et al.*).

Alpine Swift is a very rare visitor to Scotland, seen usually between mid-April and late July. Spring occurrences probably involve overshoots from mountain breeding grounds on the European continent, while those in summer relate to wandering non-breeders. There are very few autumn records.

The Clyde bird, the only Alpine Swift seen in Scotland during 2017, frequented an area over trees next to Baron's Haugh where it was presumably catching insects in the cold and changeable March weather. It was not known where it was roosting overnight during its five day stay, but a number of tall tower blocks nearby may have given suitable sites for this montane species, which usually roosts on cliff faces. This was the second for Clyde, the previous in early May 1992 at Balgray Reservoir. It was also the earliest Scottish record, by almost a month, the previous earliest being 15 April 1993 at Largiebaan (Largybaan), Campbeltown, Argyll; on the continent birds first arrive in breeding areas during March.

(Nominate *alba* breeds in north Africa and southern Europe from Iberia to the Middle East, moving to southern Africa in winter. Other subspecies in the Indian subcontinent and Africa.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
86: 21: 7

Table 15. Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Caithness** Mey, second-calendar-year, male, 28 May, photo (S. Manson, K. Munro *et al.*). **Fair Isle** Mire o' Vatnagaard, second-calendar-year, male, 16 June, photo (C.R. Hatsell *et al.*). **Fair Isle** Pund, first-calendar-year, 19 August, photo (R. Cope *et al.*). **Highland** Strathdearn, Garbole, Inverness, second-calendar-year, female, 7–9 June, photo (*per* Local Recorder). **Orkney** Burness, Sanday, male, 16 June, photo (R. Neave, W. Sichel *et al.*). **Orkney** Bewan, Papa Westray, first-calendar-year, 25 September, photo (D. Roche *et al.*). **Upper Forth** Kirkton Farm, Crianlarich, first-calendar-year, 13 October, photo (J. Holland).

Woodchat Shrike is a rare, almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland, with most in the Northern Isles. Adults and sub-adults are seen in spring as overshoots from their European continental breeding areas, with dispersing juveniles recorded in autumn.

The seven records in 2017 made the highest annual total for the species in Scotland; six birds were seen in 1988, and five in another six years since 1966. The Crianlarich bird was the first for the Upper Forth recording area; the Strathdearn record was the first for Inverness, though the ninth for Highland as a whole.

(Nominate *senator* breeds from north-west Africa, Iberia, France and Belgium south to Turkey; *badius* on Mediterranean islands; and another subspecies from Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
68 (1950–2004): 26: 1

Table 16. Accepted records of Woodlark in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Shetland** Norwick, Unst, two, 10 February to 8 March, photo, same as 2016 (McGowan & McInerny 2018). **Shetland** Wick of Gruting, Fetlar, 23 October (B.H. Thomason).

Woodlark is rare in Scotland, found mostly in late autumn and early winter in the Northern Isles. There has been one instance of attempted breeding, in Angus & Dundee in 1993 (Forrester *et al.* 2007), though only one mainland occurrence since 2000, in Lothian in 2008. Since 1950, the vast majority of occurrences have been on the Northern Isles, with 70% on Fair Isle and Shetland.

There were just two sightings of Woodlark in 2017, both in Shetland. However, the two birds at Norwick, Unst, Shetland were considered to be the same individuals seen in November 2016 at Northdale and Haroldswick, Unst, and so are not counted in the species total.

(Two subspecies. *L. a. arborea* breeds in north and central European areas from western Russia through Finland and Norway to England, where present north to Yorkshire. The other subspecies breeds from Iran and the Middle East through southern Europe to north-west Africa. Most populations move south to wintering areas, with more northerly populations moving the farthest.)

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
286: 87: 9

Table 17. Accepted record of Short-toed Lark in Scotland, 2017. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 18.

2017: **Lothian** Tyninghame, 22–24 July, photo (C.N. Davison, K. Gillon *et al.*); same, Tyninghame 11–16 September (M. Hannam *et al.*).

Short-toed Lark is found annually in Scotland in very small numbers, mostly in spring and autumn, with the majority of observations in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. It is very rare elsewhere, particularly on the mainland.

The sighting in Lothian was the first on mainland Scotland since one near Arbroath, Angus & Dundee in 2009; the last in Lothian was one in 2004, also at Tyninghame.

Table 18. Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2017.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	1	1	1–2 Jun	6–18 Oct
Shetland	3	3	6 May–11 Jun	26 Aug–2 Oct

Perhaps most noteworthy is the lack of a sighting on Fair Isle in 2017; this was the first blank year for the island since 1963. Eight were seen elsewhere in the Northern Isles, with two on Orkney and six on Shetland.

(Eight or nine subspecies, with the subspecies seen in Scotland and the UK undetermined. Breeds widely in dry, sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to the Middle East and western China, with populations migrating to winter in India, the Middle East and Africa.)

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*
40: 46: 4

Table 19. Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2017.

2017: **Argyll** Gott, Tiree, 24 May, photo (M. & A. Harrison *et al.*).
Fair Isle Hesswalls & Vaasetter, 23 May (N.J. Riddiford).
Orkney Peedie Sea, Kirkwall, Mainland, 11–14 May, photo (G. Cannon, A. Upton *et al.*).
Shetland Norwick, Unst, 16 May (A.M. Conlin).

Red-rumped Swallow is observed in Scotland annually in small numbers from April through to November, mainly along the east coast and on islands. A small increase in frequency over the last 14 years or so is thought to reflect a northward expansion of the European continental breeding range. One individual of an eastern subspecies, either *daurica* or *japonica*, has been observed on Orkney and then Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, Highland, in June 2011 (McGowan *et al.* 2013).

The four occurrences in 2017 matched the annual mean total for the last ten years. The May dates are typical of peak arrival. Fair Isle has 12% of the total Scottish records since 1950. The last sighting on mainland Scotland was at Scourie, Sutherland, Highland in 2013.

(Eleven or 12 subspecies. Breeds widely from southern Europe eastwards across the Palearctic region, and in sub-Saharan Africa. *C. d. rufula* breeds in Europe and the Middle East, with nominate *daurica* and *japonica* in Asia. Northern populations are migratory, wintering in Africa and southern Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western European areas.)

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
60: 52: 8

Dusky Warbler is a rare but more or less annual visitor to Scotland, with the autumn migration period accounting for all but two sightings. Like Radde's Warbler, it occurs mainly in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. Nearly all other sightings have been along the east coast of mainland Scotland.

None were recorded outwith the Northern Isles in 2017, which are shown in Table 20. Here there were eight sightings: two on Fair Isle, two on Orkney and four on Shetland.

Table 20. Accepted records of Dusky Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2017.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	1	2 May	19–22 Oct
Orkney	-	2	-	10–26 Oct
Shetland	-	4	-	6–29 Oct

The May sighting on Fair Isle was only the second spring occurrence in Scotland. The October dates for the other seven birds were typical.

The middle total in the header line has been increased by an additional two records from Shetland, as a belated adjustment from earlier reports: viz. Sandwick, Mainland, 19 October 2012 (*Scottish Birds* 35: 119); and Sandgarth, Voe, Mainland, 9 November 2014 (*Shetland Bird Report* 2014: 79).

(Breeds from western Siberia to China, wintering from the Himalayas to south China; two subspecies, with European vagrants belonging to nominate *fuscatus*.)

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
46: 26: 2

Table 21. Accepted records of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Shetland** Sandwick, Mainland, 29 September, photo (E. Casey, R.M. Fray). **Shetland** Dale of Walls, Mainland, 8 October, photo (R.M. Fray, P. Norris, M. Ponsford *et al.*).

Radde's Warbler is a rare late autumn visitor to Scotland, with the majority of occurrences in the Northern Isles, principally Shetland, and the remainder along the east coast. The two seen in 2017 were typical in timing and location, though the Sandwick bird was unusual in being found exhausted at Sandwick Junior High School, where it subsequently died having flown into a window. Photographs taken by a pupil and shown to the Local Recorder allowed its identification. There has been a good run for this species in recent years, with 2011 being the last blank year.

(Breeds from southern Siberia east to Sakhalin and North Korea; migrates to winter in southern China and south-east Asia.)

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
157: 101: 5

Table 22. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2017. Records from the Northern Isles are summarised in the text.

2017:	**Argyll** Turraman Loch, Colonsay, male, singing, 15 June, photo (I. Fisher, D.C. Jardine *et al.*). **Outer Hebrides** Eirisgeigh (Eriskay), male, singing, 31 May, photo (J.B. Kemp *et al.*).

Greenish Warbler is a rare but annual migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular over the past few decades. It is mostly seen in late August and early September, with more than 80% of sightings in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally.

Plate 86. Radde's Warbler, first-calendar-year, Isle of May, 6 October 2016. See *Scottish Birds* 38(2): 111. © *Chris Southall*

The Argyll and Outer Hebrides sightings were the third for these recording areas. In the Northern Isles one bird was seen at Isbister, Whalsay, Shetland on 7 June, while there were two sightings in Orkney: one at Holland House, North Ronaldsay on 24–27 August and one at Hundland, Papa Westray on 12 September.

(Four subspecies. *P. t. viridanus* breeds from the Baltic east through Russia to central Siberia and northwest China, wintering in the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka. Other subspecies breed in central and eastern Palearctic areas, wintering in southern India and northern Indochina.)

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
46: 111: 11

Table 23. Accepted record of Blyth's Reed Warbler in Scotland, 2017. Records for Shetland and Fair Isle are summarised in Table 24.

2017: **Highland** Inverdruie Fish Farm, Aviemore, Badenoch & Strathspey, second-calendar-year/adult, male, singing, 28 June to 3 July, photo (N. Barber, P. Stronach *et al.*).
Orkney Sandback, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year, 25 August, photo (G. Gay *et al.*).
Orkney Holland House, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year, 26–29 September, trapped, photo (S.J. Davies *et al.*).
Orkney Sandside Bay, Deerness, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 4 October, photo (R. Cruise, A. John, M. Warren *et al.*).

Blyth's Reed Warbler is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly seen since 2000. Although the first Scottish record dates from 1910, 68% of occurrences have been in the last decade. The increasing frequency of the species in Scotland follows a westward spread from European Russia through southern Finland, Estonia and Latvia, with breeding also noted in Sweden and Poland (BirdLife International 2019a).

The recent significant increase in numbers seen in Britain means that the species no longer meets criteria for consideration by BBRC and is instead reviewed by SBRC. However, from 1 January 2017 the species has been assessed by local committees on Shetland and Fair Isle (Appendix 2), where five and two were recorded, respectively.

The overwhelming majority of sightings (88%) have been in the Northern Isles. While most occurrences are in September and October, there have been an increasing number of spring singing males over the last several years, such as the one in Highland which was the fourth for the recording area. This bird was discovered at Inverdruie Fish Farm, Aviemore by a visitor on holiday from North America, who alerted the Local Recorder. It was 'remarkably showy for the species, singing amongst bramble, raspberry and nettles and occasionally in the adjacent Alder trees'.

Table 24. Accepted records of Blyth's Reed Warbler in Shetland and Fair Isle, 2017.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	1	9 Jun	25 Sep
Shetland	1	4	3 Jun	20 Sep–13 Oct

The middle total in the header line has been adjusted following a late acceptance of a 2011 record from Highland viz. Handa, Sutherland, 24–25 August (Holt *et al.* 2018).

(Breeds from Sweden, Finland and Baltic countries, through Russia to Lake Baikal and Mongolia, and south to Iran and north Pakistan; migrates to winter in the Indian subcontinent and Myanmar.)

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
many: *c.* 361: 26

Table 25. Accepted record of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2017. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 26.

2017: **Outer Hebrides** Bàgh a' Chaisteil, Barraigh (Castlebay, Barra), male, singing, 4 June, photo (B.A. Taylor *et al.*).

Marsh Warbler is a scarce annual migrant to Scotland with most occurrences involving singing males in late spring; very rarely, birds remain to breed. The Northern Isles account for the overwhelming majority of records, and these are assessed locally.

The sighting in Outer Hebrides was the seventh for the recording area and the first for Barraigh (Barra).

Table 26. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2017.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	6	2	7–26 Jun	19 Sep–1 Oct
Orkney	1	3	10–11 Jun	17 Aug–30 Sep
Shetland	9	4	30 May–28 Jun	28 Aug–20 Oct

The 26 Marsh Warblers observed in Scotland in 2017 was lower than the annual mean of 31.5 between 2007 and 2016. The fluctuating annual abundance of this species is related, for spring birds at least, to variation in the prevalence of easterly winds in late May and early June, which are presumed to cause them to overshoot their breeding grounds in Fennoscandia during northerly spring migration (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

As is usual, most single birds in 2017 only remained for a few days, though one on Foula, Shetland lingered from 12 June to 2 July. Singing males were heard in Outer Hebrides, Fair Isle (one) and Shetland (two), with a pair observed on Foula from 17 June to 16 July. Breeding has been noted at Norwick, Unst, Shetland in 2005, 2008 and 2014 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010b, McGowan & McInerny 2016).

(Breeds in Britain, France, Denmark and Fennoscandia east through Europe to Russia; winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
53: 13: 2

Table 27. Accepted records of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2017.

2017: **Fair Isle** Schoolton & Houll, 17 September, photo (N.J. Riddiford, D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Orkney Cott, Papa Westray, first-calendar-year, 25 August, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).

Melodious Warbler is a very rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, recorded in most years but not all: for example, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2016 were blank years. About three quarters of occurrences have been in the Northern Isles.

(Breeds in north Africa, Iberia, France, Belgium, and south-west Germany to the north-west Balkans; migrates to winter in sub-Saharan West Africa.)

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*
193: 87: 6

Table 28. Accepted record of Subalpine Warbler in Scotland, 2017. Northern Isle records are summarised separately in Table 29.

2017: **Argyll** Carnan Mòr, Tiree, male, 7 May, photo (J. Bowler), *S. cantillans* species.

Subalpine Warbler occurs annually in Scotland as a rare migrant, mainly in spring. The overwhelming majority are seen in the Northern Isles.

All records to subspecies level have been assessed by BBRC, while Subalpine Warbler *sensu latu* is assessed by SBRC apart from the Northern Isles where it is reviewed locally. However, from 1 January 2019 all records will be considered by BBRC (Appendix 2). Northern Isles records are listed in Table 29.

The Tiree bird was the second sighting for Argyll, the first also occurring on Tiree in 2012. It was accepted at species level, but was only the fifth Subalpine Warbler seen outwith the Northern Isles since 2009.

Plate 87. Melodious Warbler, first-calendar-year, Cott, Papa Westray, Orkney, 25 August 2017. © *David Roche*

Table 29. Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2017, and additional records for 2016 and 2015 (*per* Holt *et al.* 2018, and local committees).

2017: **Fair Isle** Chalet, second-calendar-year, male, 30–31 May, trapped, DNA analysis, photo (W. Carter, C.R. Hatsell, D. Parnaby *et al.*), *S. c. iberiae/inornata*.
Orkney West Kirkbest, Westray, female, 14 July, photo (D. & S. Otter), *S. cantillans* species.
Shetland Scatness, Mainland, second-calendar-year, male, 2–4 May, photo (S.J. Minton *et al.*), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.
Shetland Scatness, Mainland, second-calendar-year, female, 10 May, trapped, photo (S.J. Minton, R. Riddington), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.
Shetland Scousburgh, Mainland, second-calendar-year, male, 29 May, photo (J.N. Dymond), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.

2016: **Shetland** Ham, Foula, second-calendar-year, male, 14–20 May, later found dead, photo (D. & G. Atherton *et al.*), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.

2015: **Shetland** Gravins, Foula, second-calendar-year or older, male, 12 June, photo (D. & G. Atherton *et al. per* Local Recorder), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.
Shetland Cullivoe, Yell, second-calendar-year, male, singing, 1–6 July, audio recording (B.H. Thomason), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.

In 2017 the Orkney bird was accepted at species level. The Fair Isle bird was accepted as 'Western Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. iberiae/inornata* following DNA analysis, and the three Shetland occurrences were accepted as 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. cantillans/albistriata.*

It should be noted that five individuals on Shetland during April to June 2017 were determined only as either Subalpine Warbler or Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler *S. subalpina* (R. Fray pers. com., Holt *et al.* 2018). As these were therefore not identified to species, they are excluded from the species total in the header line.

(Nominate *cantillans* breeds in south Italy and Sicily, *albistriata* from south-east Europe through Greece, Aegean Islands to Turkey, *iberiae* in Iberian Peninsula, south France and North-west Italy, *inornata* from Morocco to Libya. Migrates to winter in the sub-Saharan Sahel, though *inornata* probably north-west Africa.)

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
139: 24: 2

Nightingale is a rare, but almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland; spring observations predominate. In the Northern Isles, claims are assessed locally, and Fair Isle and Shetland account for the vast majority of sightings.

There were two occurrences in 2017. The first was seen at Ham, Foula, Shetland on 18 May, and the second one at Tor Ness, North Ronaldsay, Orkney on 27 May.

There has been a total of 13 sightings in the last four years, all but four on Shetland.

(Nominate *megarhynchos* breeds from Morocco and western Europe through North Africa and southern and central Europe to the Ukraine and Turkey; *L. m. golzii* from the Aral Sea to Mongolia (one record in Scotland, and another two in England); and another subspecies from the Caucasus area and eastern Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
15: 56: 3

Table 30. Accepted records of Red-flanked Bluetail in Scotland, 2017.

2017: **Caithness** Coastguard Station, Wick, first-calendar-year/female, 19 October (P. Shand).
Fair Isle School & Hall, first-calendar-year/female, 18–19 October, photo (A. Carroll, H. Fearn, B. Minshull *et al.*).
Shetland Isbister, North Roe, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 5–16 October, photo (A. Matthews *et al. per* Local Recorder).

Red-flanked Bluetail is a rare but annual migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular in the last two decades. The vast majority (96%) of sightings in Scotland have been in autumn and 81% have been in the Northern Isles.

Assessment of Red-flanked Bluetail was undertaken by BBRC until 1 January 2017. A recent increase in numbers seen in Britain means that the species no longer meets criteria for consideration by BBRC, and it is now assessed by SBRC (Appendix 2).

Plate 88. Red-flanked Bluetail, first-calendar-year, Isbister, North Roe, Shetland, 5–16 October 2017. © *Mark Wilkinson*

The Caithness sighting was the first for the recording area and only the 13th for the Scottish mainland. The October dates of all three 2017 observations were typical.

(Breeds in Finland through Eurasia to Kamchatka and south to Mongolia, China and Japan. Migrates to winter in China and south-east Asia.)

The Fair Isle sighting was typical in locality and timing.

(Nominate *citreola* breeds in Russia from Kola Peninsula to River Khatanga, south to Himalayas; another subspecies south of Tien Shan Mountains. Migrates to winter in China, south-east Asia, north of the Indian subcontinent and shores of Arabian Gulf.)

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
105: 89: 1

Table 31. Accepted record of Citrine Wagtail in Scotland, 2017.

2017:	**Fair Isle** South Harbour, first-calendar-year, 17 September, photo (R. Cope *et al.*).

Citrine Wagtail is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular since the 1990s, though found mostly on islands. Occurrence is generally in autumn, with few seen in spring. The overwhelming majority (86%) have been in the Northern Isles, with a further 7% in Outer Hebrides. Despite the recent increase in numbers, Citrine Wagtail remains an extreme rarity in other parts of the country, being unrecorded in ten recording areas.

Plate 89. Citrine Wagtail, first-calendar-year, South Harbour, Fair Isle, 17 September 2017. © *Richard Cope*

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
151: 185: 18

Table 32. Accepted record of Olive-backed Pipit in Scotland, 2017. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 33.

2017: **Isle of May** 27–28 September, photo (M.A. Newell, D. Steel *et al.*).

Olive-backed Pipit is a rare but regular autumn migrant in Scotland. There was a marked increase in occurrences in Britain and Europe since the 1980s. The species has been considered by SBRC since 2013 and assessed locally in the Northern Isles since 2015 (Appendix 2).

The vast majority of sightings in Scotland are in the Northern Isles, with only 23 birds (7%) seen in other areas. During 2017, 18 birds were observed, with two on Fair Isle, six on Orkney and nine on Shetland. The observation on the Isle of May was the eighth for the island.

Table 33. Accepted records of Olive-backed Pipit in the Northern Isles, 2017.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	2	-	27 Sep–27 Oct
Orkney	-	6	-	24 Sep–26 Oct
Shetland	-	9	-	30 Sep–26 Oct

(*A. h. yunnanensis* breeds from Urals east to Kamchatka, Manchuria and Japan; one other subspecies. Winters in south-east Asia.)

Plate 90. Olive-backed Pipit, Isle of May, 27–28 September 2017. © *Mark Newell*

Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni*
366: 129: 27

Arctic Redpoll is a scarce though annual visitor to Scotland. Most sightings since 2005 have involved the subspecies *A. h. hornemanni* (Hornemann's Redpoll), though many earlier occurrences referred to *A. h. exilipes* (Coues's Redpoll).

All records to subspecies level have been assessed by BBRC, while Arctic Redpoll *sensu latu* is assessed by SBRC apart from the Northern Isles where it is reviewed locally. However, from 1 January 2019 all records will be considered by BBRC (Appendix 2).

No records were assessed by SBRC for 2017. A summary of records accepted by BBRC is provided in Table 34.

Table 34. Accepted records of Arctic Redpoll in Scotland, 2017 (*per* Holt *et al.* 2018, and local committees).

2017: **Clyde** Earnock, Hamilton, two, second-calendar-year or older, 14 February, photo (S. Ball, J. Maxwell, L. Stewart *et al.*), *A. h. exilipes*.
Fair Isle Quoy, 23 October (R. Nason), *A. hornemanni* species.
Fair Isle Pund, Gilsetter and School Brae, first-calendar-year or older, 23–30 October, photo (R. Cope, C. Dodd, D. Parnaby *et al.*), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Orkney Westness, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year or older, 8–10 October, photo (P. Gay *et al.*), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Orkney Nether Linnay, North Ronaldsay, 21 October (S.J. Davies), *A. hornemanni* species.
Orkney The Lurn, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year or older, 24 October, photo (S.Z. Perfect *et al.*), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Orkney Manse Lane, Stromness, Mainland, four, 15 December, photo (T. Wootton), *A. hornemanni* species.
Outer Hebrides Nis (Ness), Lewis, second-calendar-year or older, 17 March, photo (S. Elmer *per* B.E.M. Marr), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Shetland Norwick, Unst, first-calendar-year or older, 20 September, photo (E. Williams), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Shetland Ollaberry, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 6–8 October, photo (R. Hughes *et al.*), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Shetland Skaw, Unst, first-calendar-year or older, 6–7 October, photo, same as Baltasound below (P.N. Collin, D. Weir *et al.*), *A. h. hornemanni*.

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, two, first-calendar-year or older, 6–14 October, then a further three, first-calendar-year or older, 15–31 October, photo (*per* Local Recorder), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Shetland Ham, Foula, first-calendar-year, 7–16 October, photo (G. Atherton *et al.*), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Shetland Baltasound, Unst, first-calendar-year, 8–11 October, photo (M.A. Maher, M.G. Pennington, B.H. Thomason *et al.*), *A. h. exilipes*.
Shetland Melby, Mainland, two, first-calendar-year, 20 October, trapped, photo (R. Riddington, R.M. Tallack), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Shetland Uyeasound, Unst, two, first-calendar-year or older, 24 October, photo (A.P. Chick, J. Clarkston, P. Espin, A.C. Sims *per* Local Recorder), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Shetland Uyeasound, Unst, first-calendar-year or older, 28 October, photo (B.H. Thomason), *A. h. hornemanni*.
Shetland Baltasound, Unst, first-calendar-year or older, 25 December, photo (B.H. Thomason), *A. h. hornemanni*.

Twenty-seven Arctic Redpolls were sighted in Scotland in 2017, this being the second highest annual total in the last two decades, and only exceeded by 30 in 2012.

A total of 18 *hornemanni* were observed with autumn dates ranging from 20 September to 25 December, and three *exilipes* with autumn dates ranging from 8–11 October. Six individuals on Fair Isle and Orkney were accepted at species level only.

The observations in late winter and spring are noteworthy: the two in Clyde were only the 12th and 13th sightings in February and were the first for that recording area; the bird at Nis (Ness), Lewis was only the second sighting in the first half of March.

Note the additional four records from 2016 listed in Appendix 3.

(Breeds on the Arctic tundra, with a circumpolar range divided between two subspecies: *A. h. hornemanni* on Ellesmere and Baffin Island (both Canada) and in Greenland, and *A. h. exilipes* elsewhere. Winters to the south of the breeding range.)

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
many: 52: 5

Ortolan Bunting is a rare and declining, but still annual, passage migrant to Scotland. In recent years the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally, have accounted for more than 90% of occurrences.

There were no observations in 2017 outwith the Northern Isles, where five were seen.

Records from Orkney and Shetland are shown in Table 35. There were two spring sightings, with the date for the North Ronaldsay, Orkney bird being relatively late. The autumn dates were typical of the September peak.

The general trend of decreasing numbers over the last two decades appears to be continuing. This reflects the 'steep decline' of the European population between 1980 and 2013, thought to be due to habitat destruction (EBCC 2015, BirdLife International 2019b).

Table 35. Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2017.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	1	2	8–10 Jun	13–28 Sep
Shetland	1	1	14 May	11–16 Sep

(Breeds patchily from Algeria and Iberia north to Norway and east through Europe to Asia; winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*
593: 378: 75

Table 36. Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2017, and an additional record for 2015. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 37.

2017: **Highland** Keoldale, Durness, Sutherland, first-calendar-year, 29 September, photo (A. Williams *et al.*).
Isle of May 16–18 September, photo (G. Routledge *et al.*).
Lothian Skateraw, 20–21 October, photo (A.F. Thomas *et al.*).

2015: **Outer Hebrides** Football pitch, Bàgh a' Chaisteil, Barraigh (Castlebay, Barra), 23 October, photo (I. Ricketts).

Little Bunting is a scarce but increasingly regular passage migrant to Scotland, mostly in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. The great majority are found in autumn, but there have also been a few in winter and spring. The increase in frequency in recent years has been dramatic; the mean annual total for the last ten years was 40.1 birds, compared to 18.6 for the preceding ten-year period. There is no obvious explanation for the increase in Scottish observations as the European population is thought to be stable (BirdLife International 2019c).

Whilst the total of 72 for the Northern Isles in 2017 did not match the highest annual total of 97 in 2016, it was still the second highest annual number of sightings.

Two of the three occurrences outwith the Northern Isles in 2017 were on the Scottish mainland. The sighting at Keoldale, Durness, Sutherland was the tenth for the recording area; and the observation at Skateraw, Lothian was only the third for that recording area.

The spring sighting on Fair Isle was notable, lingering from 2–14 May. The last spring occurrences in Scotland were in 2014, with two on Fair Isle, one on Orkney and three in Shetland.

Table 37. Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2017.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	9	2–14 May	11 Sep–28 Oct
Orkney	-	7	-	24 Sep–4 Oct
Shetland	-	55	-	20 Sep–5 Nov

(Breeds from northern Fennoscandia to eastern Siberia; winters from north-east India and Nepal to south-east Asia.)

Plate 91. Little Bunting, Isle of May, 16–18 September 2017. © *Gus Routledge*

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Appendix 1.

List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

2017: White-billed Diver (23), Dunnet Bay, Caithness, 21 July; White-billed Diver, Embo, Sutherland, Highland, 4–13 October; White-billed Diver, Brora, Sutherland, Highland, 13 October to 5 January 2018; White-billed Diver, Papa Westray, Orkney, 23 October; White-billed Diver, Peterhead, North-east Scotland, 28 December; Cory's Shearwater, Fife Ness, Fife, 4 August; Blyth's Reed Warbler, Haskies, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 7 October.

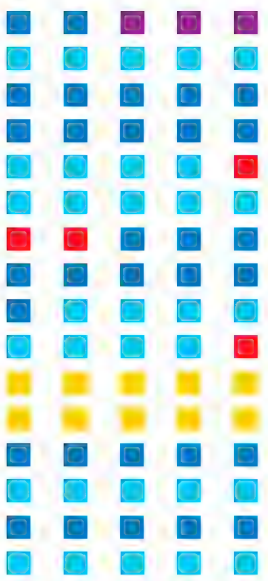
2016: White-billed Divers (12), Mull Head, Papa Westray, Orkney, 10 November to 27 December.

2009: Yellow-legged Gull, Isle of Raasay, Skye & Lochalsh, Highland, 4 July.

Appendix 2.

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), the SBRC List, and other committees, 2015–19. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included with two exceptions. First, any species or subspecies not on the *Scottish List* is automatically assessed by SBRC if it is not assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Second, some species on the *Scottish List* have additional rare subspecies assessed by BBRC that are not shown here. Species and subspecies considered by BBRC are listed on www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/species-taxa

Black Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans*
Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*
Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*
Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*
White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*
Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*
Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*
Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*
Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Continental Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*
White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* (except *L. m. atlantis* - BBRC)
White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Franz Josef Land Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*
Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* (except *L. s. badius* - BBRC)
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (except *C. d. daurica* or *japonica* - BBRC)
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*



Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*
Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans**
Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* (except *L. m. golzii* - BBRC)
Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni**
Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*
Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*
Serin *Serinus serinus*
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

■ = SBRC ■ = BBRC ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland) ■ = SBRC except Shetland and Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC except Fair Isle and Shetland ■ = SBRC except Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC outside core range www.the-soc.org.uk/content/bird-recording/sbrc/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills

* Up to 31 December 2018 only birds not identified to any particular subspecies were considered by SBRC or local committees; birds identified to subspecies were assessed by BBRC. From 1 January 2019 all records to be considered by BBRC.

The species and subspecies considered by SBRC listed here are also shown on www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

Appendix 3.

Corrections to previous reports:

2016: Dusky Warbler, Isle of May, **14 October.**
Greenish Warbler, Kilminning, Fife, **20 August.**
Arctic Redpoll: four records were inadvertently omitted from Table 32. The missing records are:
Fair Isle North Shirva, second-calendar-year or older, 7–16 April, trapped, photo (C.R. Hatsell, S. Thomson *et al.), A. h. hornemanni.*
Fair Isle School Brae, first-calendar-year or older, male, 9–11 November (D. Parnaby, D.N. Shaw), *A. h. exilipes.*
Fair Isle School Brae, first-calendar-year, 10–11 November, photo (D. Parnaby, D.N. Shaw), *A. h. exilipes.*
Orkney Queenamidda, Rendall, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 19–20 November, trapped, photo (A. Forsyth, M. Rendall, B. Ribbands), *A. h. exilipes.*

2013: Night-heron, Boreray, St Kilda, 4 May 2011.

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ms accepted March 2019

The status of the Mute Swan in Fife, 1992–2016

A.W. & L.M. BROWN

Prior to 1992 the only data available regarding the status of the Mute Swan population in Fife was from national censuses. Annual census of the Mute Swan in Fife in April from 1992–2016 recorded a 129% increase in the total population from 181 in 1992 to 415 birds in 2016. During the same period the territorial population increased by 135% (40 to 94 pairs) and the breeding population by 153% (26 to 66 pairs) with the number of 1-km squares holding nesting birds increasing from 24 to 51. In addition, the non-territorial component of the population increased by 124% (101 to 227) with a mean of 44% of the total population non-territorial over the study period as a whole. Most pairs held territory on standing waters, some sites holding multiple pairs. Productivity over the study period was 2.6 cygnets per breeding pair. Several sites regularly held April flocks but some such as the Eden Estuary declined in numbers over the study period whilst others such as Loch Gelly and Lindores Loch increased in numbers. An increase in suitable water bodies undoubtedly assisted the expansion in the population. Overall, in every year counts were higher than in any of the previous national censuses.

Introduction

The Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* was recorded in Fife as far back as the 16th century (Baxter & Rintoul 1953, Smout 1986) but data were very limited until the mid-20th century. Whether or not they were truly wild birds or partly domesticated is unclear but as late as 1915 a pair was presented to St Andrews Town Council to put on Cameron Reservoir (St Andrews Water Committee Minutes for 13 October 1915).

The first survey of the Mute Swan in Fife took place as part of the national census in 1955–56 (Rawcliffe 1958) with further national surveys taking place in 1961 (Eltringham 1963), 1978 (Ogilvie 1981), 1983 (Brown & Brown 1985), 1990 (Brown & Brown 1993) and 2002 (Brown & Brown 2005). There is some doubt over the thoroughness of the pre-1990 surveys and following some preliminary work in 1991 an annual census commenced in 1992, using standardised recording techniques (Gilbert *et al.* 1998). This was an extension to an existing census which commenced in Lothian in 1978 (Brown & Brown 1984, 1999, Lothian Bird Report 1981–2013). This paper presents the results of the Fife census for the 25-year period from 1992 to 2016 (Brown & Brown unpublished reports, Fife Bird Report 1992, 1999–2000, 2010–2015 and Elkins *et al. 2003, 2016*), describing the status and aspects of the population dynamics of the Mute Swan in Fife and how this compares with other Scottish regions.

Study area, aims and methods

The study encompasses the whole of Fife which is a broad peninsula situated between the Firths of Tay and Forth, to the north and south respectively, with the North Sea to the east. Covering an area of 1,305 km^2, Fife is drained by three main rivers (the Eden, Leven and Ore) together with many smaller burns and has over 400 standing waters ranging from small ponds to lochs and reservoirs and a coastline extending to 170 km (Corbet 1998). These provide diverse habitats for potential use by Mute Swans. The administrative boundary of Fife has been consistent for all the national censuses and throughout this study making for ease of comparison between them.

Aspects of the study considered below are:

a) to assess the size of the total population, this comprising non-territorial individuals and territorial/nesting pairs.
b) to monitor all nesting pairs to quantify breeding success and productivity.

Following a preliminary assessment in 1991 which identified the extent of work required to undertake a full census, this detailed study commenced in 1992. All known and potential territorial sites were visited in late March to early May to determine the territorial/breeding population; where nesting pairs were identified their progress was followed through to fledging, usually by September. A co-ordinated count of non-territorial birds took place in mid-April; this, together with the territorial/nesting pairs, provided an overall population total. Many observers assisted with the monitoring during the study period and additional data were extracted from the Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) and from data provided by the Fife Bird Recorder to ensure that the survey was as complete as possible. On this basis, it is considered that all elements of the population were thoroughly assessed throughout the study period.

Results

Total population

Counts of the total number of Mute Swans in Fife are shown in Figure 1 which also incorporates the national count data prior to 1992, and the preliminary survey in 1991, thus putting the study data into an historical context, notwithstanding the possible incomplete coverage in some of these earlier surveys. The data from this study shows that from 1992 to 2016, irrespective of annual variations, there was an increase in the total population from 181 to 415 birds representing an increase of 129%.

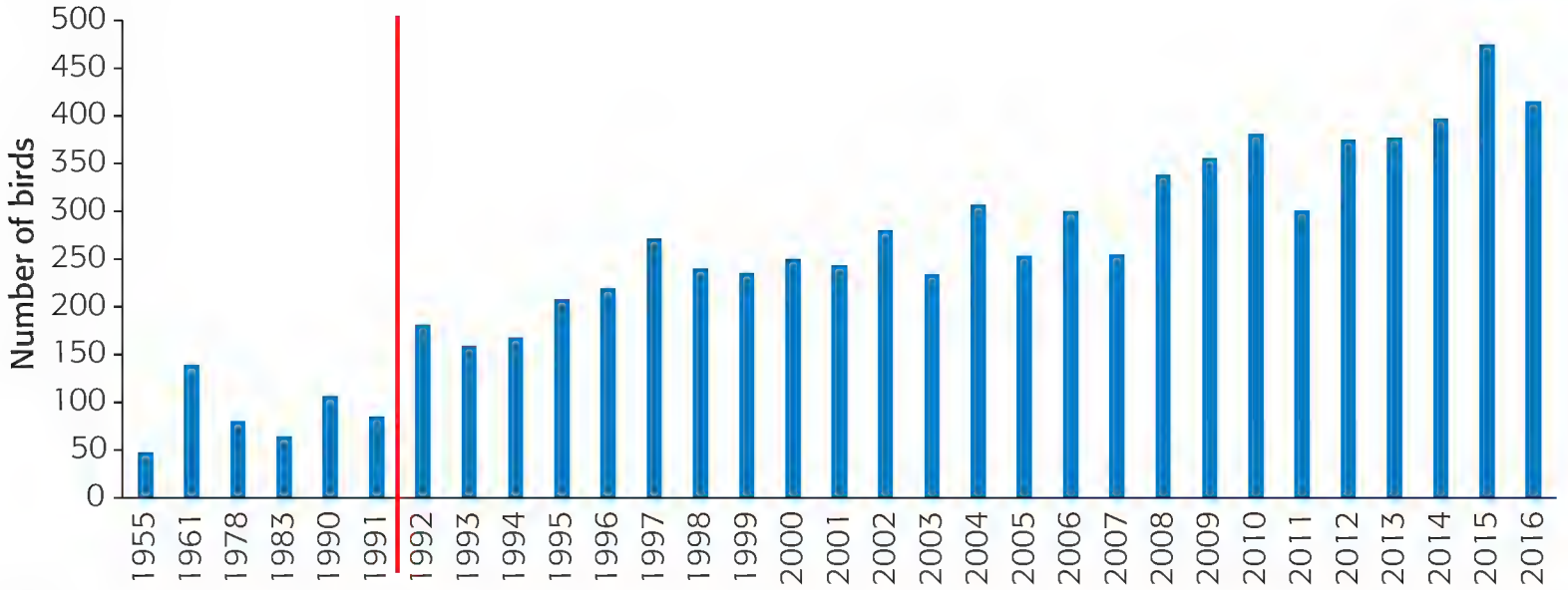

Figure 1. Total number of Mute Swans in Fife in April/May 1955, 1961, 1978, 1983, 1990–2016. Data from Rawcliffe 1958, Eltringham 1963, Ogilvie 1981, Brown & Brown 1985, 1993 and 2005) and this study (after red line). Note that prior to 1992 survey data are considered incomplete and some adjustments have been made to the published data after examination of original submissions.

Territorial and breeding pairs

The number of territorial pairs in Fife and the number of those pairs which bred indicates that there was a substantial increase in both these components of the population (Figure 2). Over the nine years 1992 to 2000 there was a 100% increase in the territorial population (from 40 to 80 pairs) followed by an increase of 28% for the 13 years from 2000 to 2012 (from 80 to 102 pairs). The corresponding figures for the nesting pairs were 146% (from 26 to 64 pairs) and 22% (from 64 to 78 pairs) respectively. Overall the territorial population increased by 135% from 40 pairs in 1992 to 94 pairs in 2016. During the same period the number of nesting pairs increased by 153% from 26 pairs in 1992 to 66 pairs in 2016. Over the study period 77% of territorial pairs progressed

Plate 92. Mute Swan, March 2014. © *Harry Scott*

to breeding which is higher than that recorded for Scotland at 74% (Brown & Brown 2005) and the 70% recorded for Orkney (Brown & Brown 2011) but lower than Lothian at 82% (Brown & Brown unpublished data). Annual reports detail the specific sites used (Brown & Brown unpublished reports and Fife Bird Reports 1992, 1999–2000, 2010–2015).

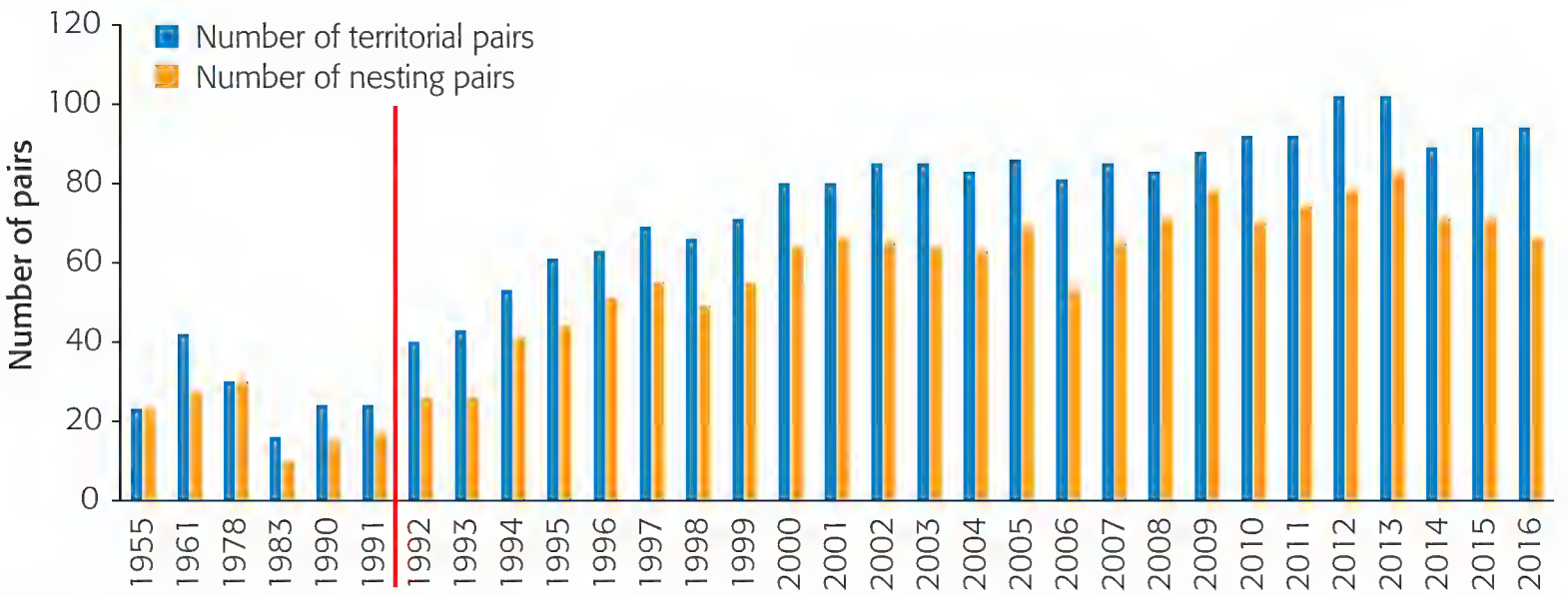

Figure 2. The number of territorial and nesting pairs of the Mute Swan in Fife during April/May 1955, 1961, 1978, 1983, 1990–2016. Data from Rawcliffe 1958, Eltringham 1963, Ogilvie 1981, Brown & Brown 1985, 1993 and 2005) and this study (after red line). Note that prior to 1992 survey data are considered incomplete and some adjustments have been made to the published data after examination of original submissions.

The location of nesting and territorial-only pairs, by 1-km square, for the beginning and end of the study period, 1992 and 2016 (Figure 3), and for the whole study period 1992–2016 (Figure 4), illustrates the extent of the expansion which occurred. Not all sites were occupied every year, but these maps highlight the geographical expansion in breeding locations which had taken place, especially in north-east Fife, and shows a pattern similar to that illustrated in the presence of nesting pairs by tetrad (2x2 km) in the Fife Bird Atlas (2003, 2016). Overall, the total number of 1-km squares where nesting was recorded increased from 24 in 1992 to 51 in 2016 and that for territorial-only pairs from two to five squares. During the whole study period (Figure 4), a total of 126 1-km squares held nesting sites and a further 13 recorded territory-only birds (with multiple pairs at a site regarded as one site). Almost all nesting sites were on inland standing waters with no more than two or three pairs recorded nesting on rivers and/or at coastal locations in any one year.

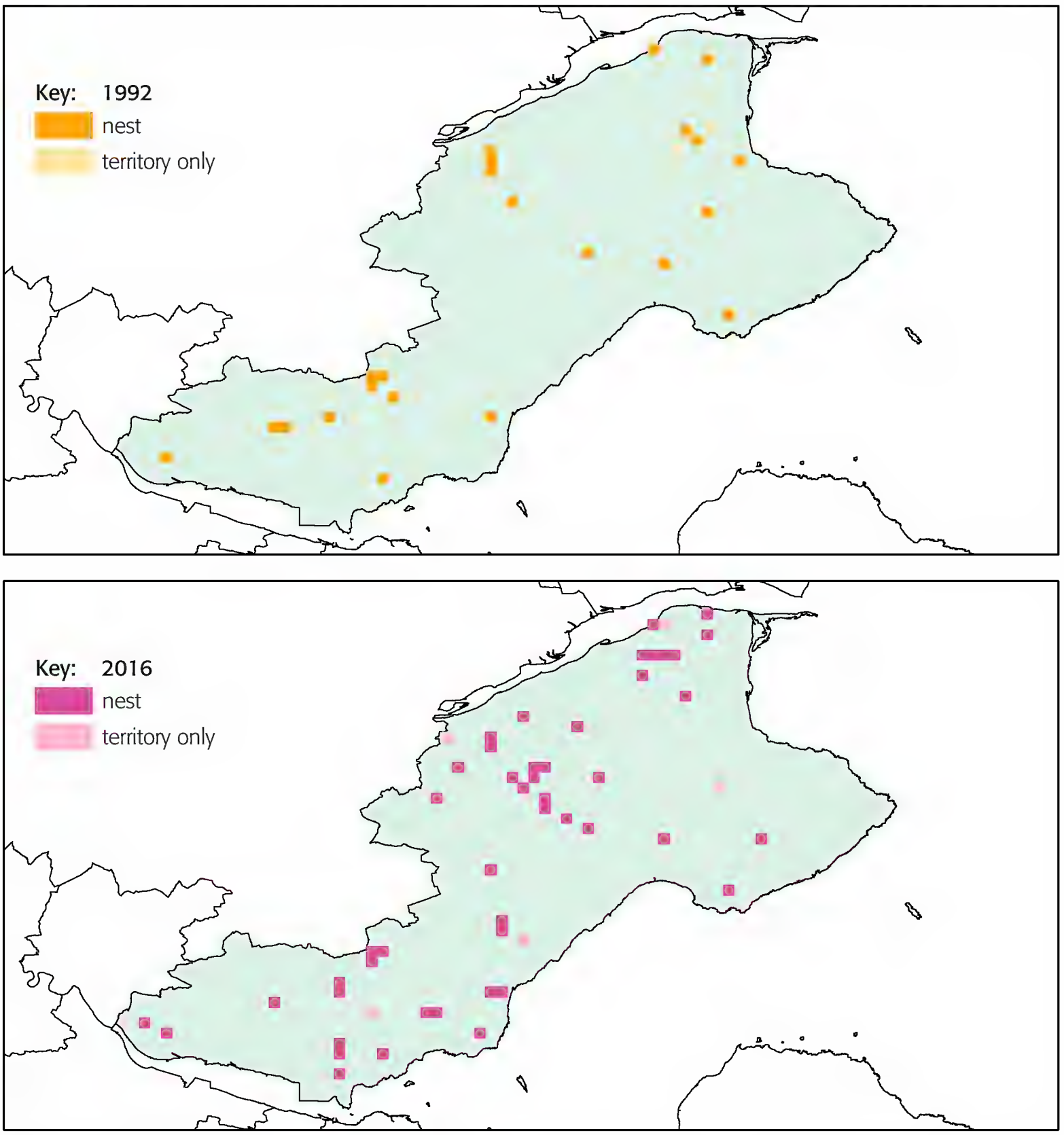

Figure 3 a–b. The location of nesting and territory only pairs of the Mute Swan in Fife, by 1-km square, in (a) 1992 and (b) 2016. Note that some individual sites such as Cameron Reservoir, Loch Gelly and Loch Ore occur in more than one 1-km square and some squares hold more than one site.

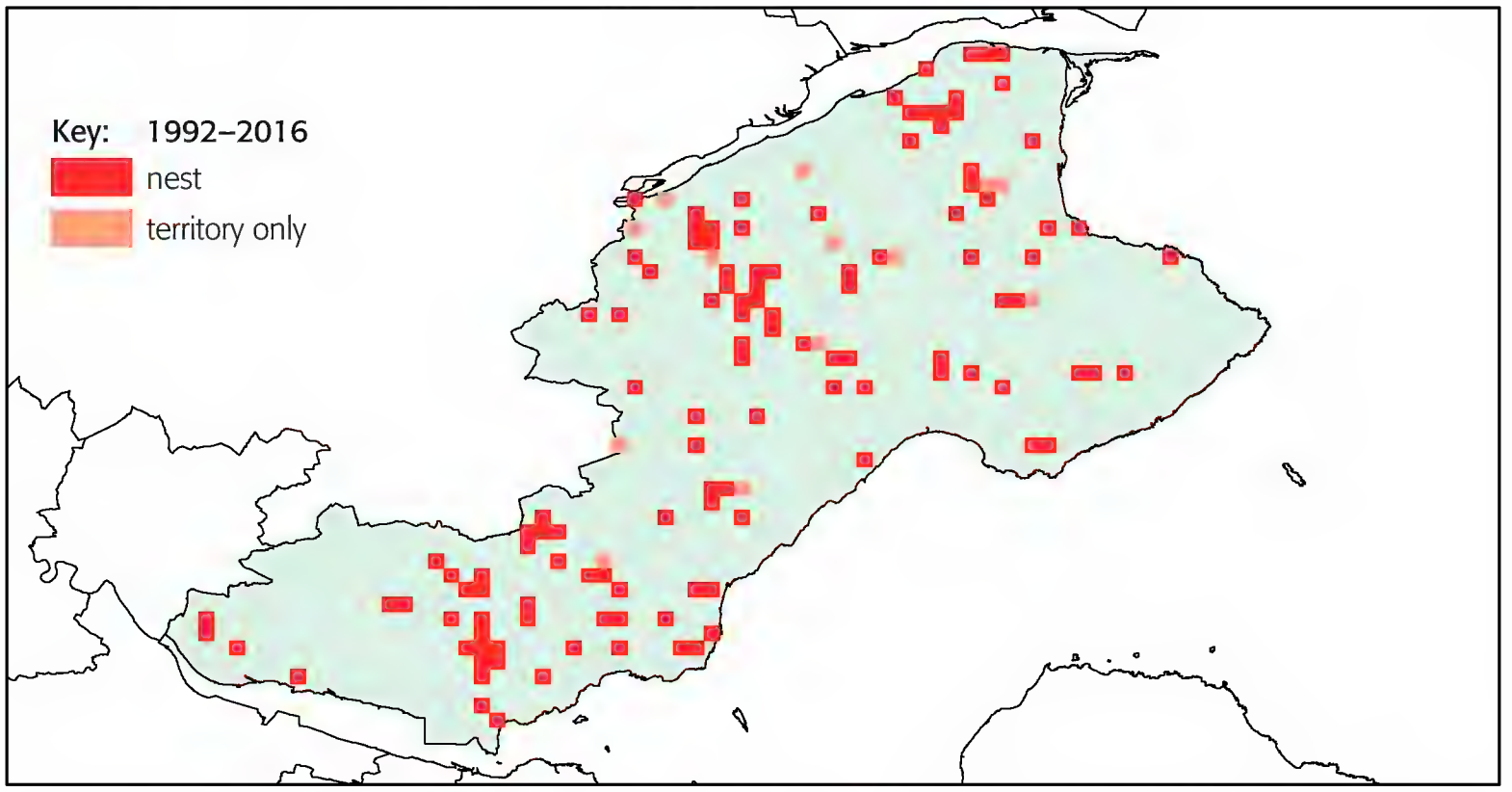

Figure 4. Mute Swan nesting and territory-only locations in Fife by 1-km square, 1992–2016. Multiple pairs at a site shown as one site if in same 1-km square but some individual sites occur in more than one 1-km square and some squares hold more than one site.

Productivity of breeding pairs

The number of pairs that fledged cygnets and the total number of cygnets fledged (Figure 5) indicated an increase of 217% in the number of fledged cygnets between 1992 (52 birds) and 2016 (165 birds) with over 150 young fledged in most years since 1999. In the years 2004 to 2009, fledging of cygnets was not confirmed at several locations (for two pairs in 2004 and 2005, nine pairs on 2006, 12 pairs in 2007 and 11 pairs in 2008 and 2009), consequently the fledged young figure for those years is a minimum total.

Productivity, as measured by the mean number of cygnets fledged per breeding pair, fluctuated between 1.9 and 3.4 with an average of 2.6. This compares with 1.8 for Orkney in the three-year period 2006–2008 (Brown & Brown 2011), 1.7 for the Uists in the two years 1978–1979 (Spray 1981), 1.6 for Ayrshire for 1983–1986 (Leech 1988) and 2.5 for Lothian for 1978–2016 (Brown &

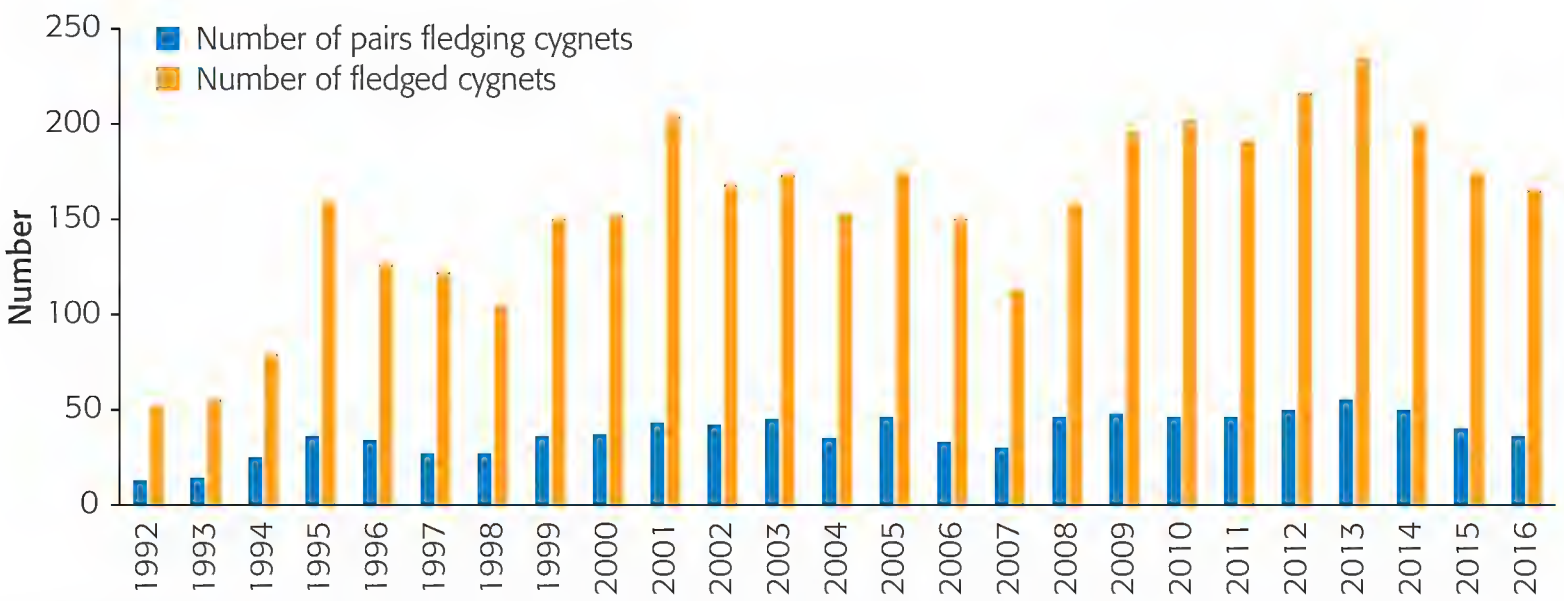

Figure 5. The number of breeding pairs of Mute Swans that fledged cygnets and the number of cygnets fledged in Fife 1992 to 2016. Note that fledging data were incomplete for several pairs in the years 2004 to 2009.

Brown 1981–2013 and unpublished data). This suggests that the Fife population is at a very sustainable level in terms of productivity, comparable with some of the studies in England (Rowell & Spray 2004), despite a recent decline in the number of fledged young. As almost all nests were on inland standing freshwater bodies, habitat difference was not a factor affecting productivity, unlike in Lothian (Brown & Brown 2002).

Non-territorial swans

The total number of non-territorial swans in mid-April in Fife (Figure 6) indicated a generally similar increasing pattern to that for the total population (Figure 1) although there was some greater variation between years. The Leven Cut, east of Loch Leven, which straddles the Fife/Kinross border, has been excluded from the counts as birds move between the two areas both within and between years. Overall, this element of the population increased by 124% between 1992 and 2016 from 101 to 227 birds. The percentage of the non-territorial population in relation to the total population (Figure 7) averaged 44% over the study period, but with an increase in that percentage since 2012 as the total population increased to its highest levels. The mean of 44% is lower than that recorded for Orkney from 2006–08 at 60% (Brown & Brown 2011), Lothian from 1978–2016 at 61% (Brown & Brown unpublished data) and Scotland in 2002 at 61% (Brown & Brown 2005).

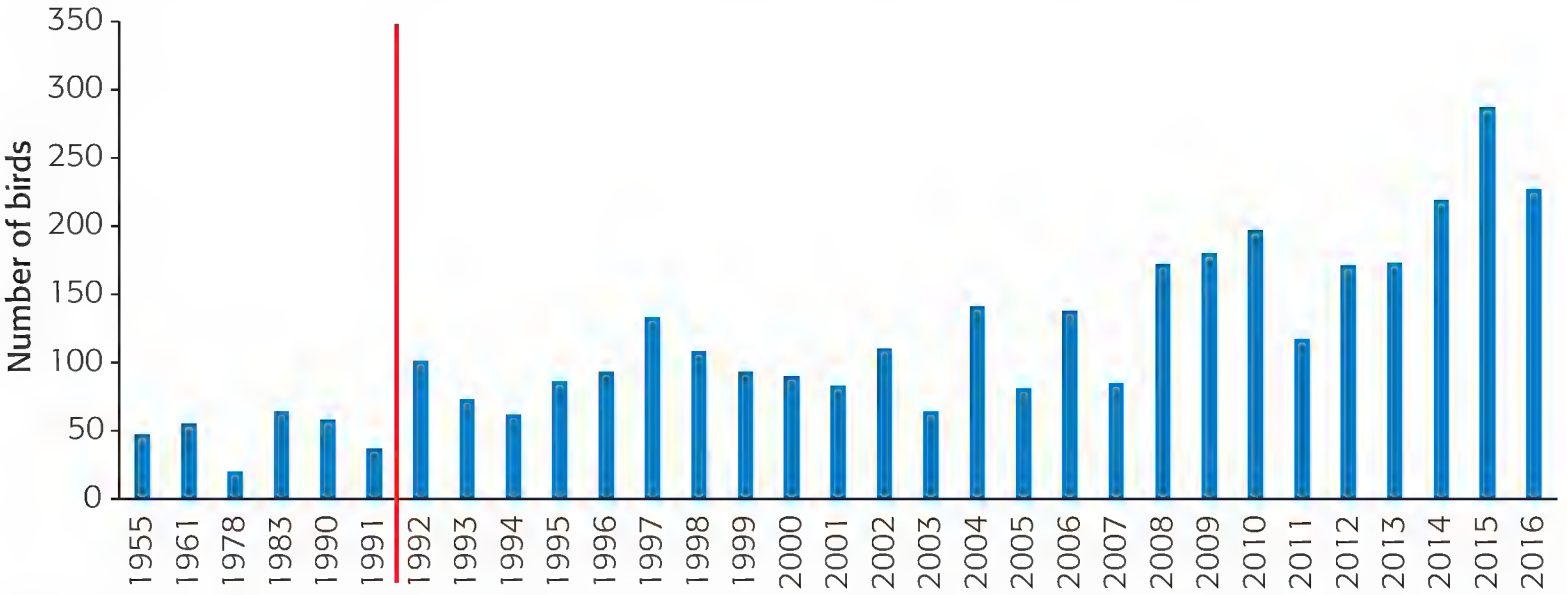

Figure 6. Total number of non-territorial Mute Swans in Fife in mid-April 1955, 1961, 1978, 1983, 1990–2016. Data from Rawcliffe 1958, Eltringham 1963, Ogilvie 1981, Brown & Brown 1985, 1993 and 2005) and this study (after red line). Note that prior to 1992 survey data are considered incomplete and some adjustments have been made to the published data after examination of original submissions.

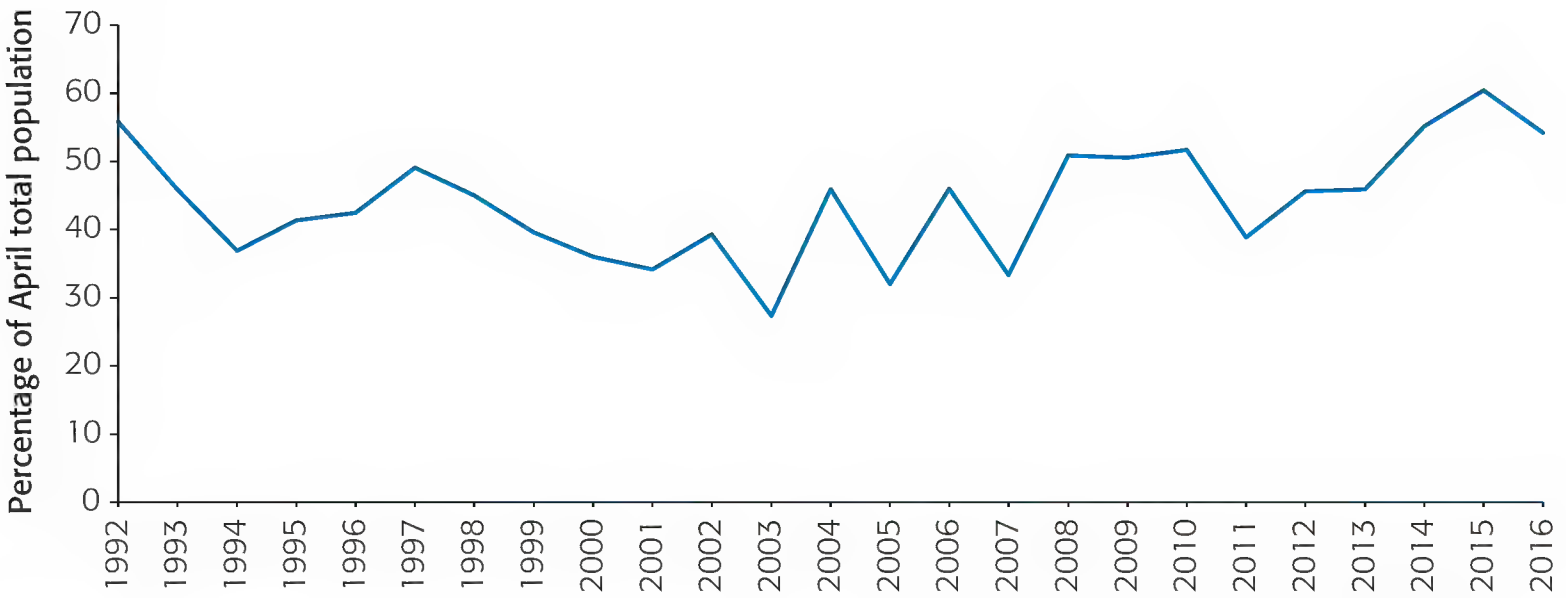

Figure 7. The percentage of the total population of the Mute Swan in Fife which was non-territorial in mid-April 1992–2016.

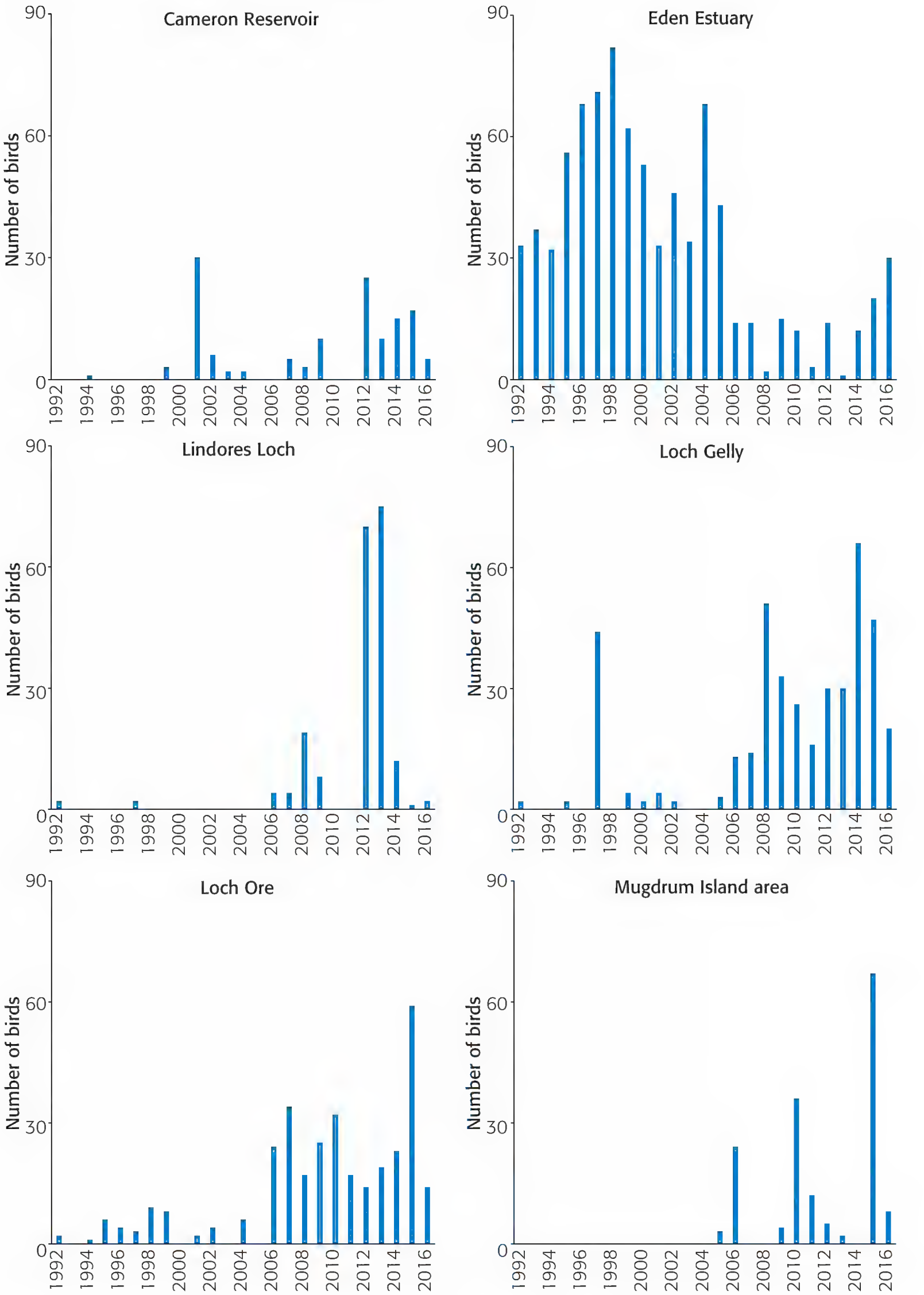

Figure 8. The number of non-territorial Mute Swans at the principal flock sites in Fife in mid-April 1992–2016.

Most non-territorial swans occurred in flocks at specific sites although use of such sites varied considerably between years. Figure 8 shows the April co-ordinated counts for the principal flock sites. This shows a decline in the use of the Eden Estuary since 2005 but a corresponding increase from that date for Lindores Loch, Loch Gelly and Loch Ore all of which held few non-territorial birds prior to 2006. A more fluctuating pattern had occurred in the vicinity of Mugdrum Island on the River Tay at Newburgh. Other sites held flocks during the year, but most birds had dispersed from these by April.

Discussion

Prior to this study the size of the Mute Swan population in Fife had been quantified through national censuses. Whilst those studies provided a baseline for this study, examination of the data submitted for them and the timing of some of the counts suggested that some of these earlier censuses may have been incomplete.

The 1961 national census appeared to have been the most comprehensive, but this was followed by severe winters in 1961/62 and 1962/63 which led to a population decrease in Britain (Ogilvie 1967) from which a full recovery had not taken place by 1978 (Kirby *et al.* 1994). Certainly, by then the Lothian population was very low (Brown & Brown 1984) and Fife had a low overall total. This study has shown an increase in the territorial/breeding and non-territorial population since 1992, with all years having counts higher than any of the previous national censuses. The run of relatively mild winters since the 1990s has undoubtedly had an impact on survival combined with years of good productivity.

The increase recorded in the territorial and breeding population showed a sustained expansion followed by a levelling off after 2000 but with a peak of just over 100 pairs present in 2012 and 2013. This increase reflected the expanding population and the number of cygnets produced and surviving to breeding age which then began to look for new territories. Within Fife, from the 1990s, unlike elsewhere in Scotland (Ward *et al.* 2007), there has been an expansion in water bodies associated with sand and gravel extraction, especially in north-east Fife in the Ladybank area (e.g. Birnie/Gaddon Lochs, Birns Farm Quarry/Angle Park, Mountcastle Quarry and The Wilderness). Many of these sites, whether active or closed, have on occasion attracted multiple pairs of nesting swans. In addition, new ponds and reservoirs have been created on farms and estates and Sustainable Urban Drainage Ponds (SUDS) have been formed within urban developments which, at least initially, have become attractive to nesting swans, especially in East Dunfermline. Lack of disturbance may be a major factor in swans using these various sites.

The productivity figure of 2.6 for Fife is greater than the figure of 2.3 calculated as necessary for the Lothian breeding population to sustain itself (Brown 1997). Unlike in Lothian, there are no major habitat differences to impact upon productivity (Brown & Brown 2002) so it is likely that annual productivity is determined by weather conditions, availability of food at nesting sites, disturbance and predation. However, the population of the Mute Swan in Fife is not closed. As well as survival of breeding adults and young, ringing of cygnets in Fife (unpublished data) and elsewhere (Brown 1997) has shown how immigration and emigration are integral components of swan population dynamics so it cannot be assumed that the observed increase is from 'resident' birds only.

Although there has been an increasing trend in the number of non-territorial swans, with peak counts of over 200 recorded in each year from 2014 to 2016, this component of the population does show considerable variation between years. The annual variations at some of the principal flock sites is almost certainly associated with the availability of adequate feeding, often in the form of Canadian Pondweed *Elodea canadensis* which can be prolific in some years (pers. obs.). Indeed, the occurrence of April flocks at some sites often follows substantial moulting and

wintering flocks from the previous year (Brown & Brown in prep.). Unlike in Lothian, flock sites in Fife do not generally benefit from supplementary feeding by the public. Ringing has shown movement of swans between the north and south sides of the River Tay (pers. obs.) with Broughty Ferry and Seggieden at Kinfauns, where birds benefitted from artificial feeding, holding over 40 birds in April during the study period and over 50 birds were often recorded in the Leven Cut east of Loch Leven. The decline in use of the Eden Estuary after 2004 is very apparent and may be feeding related as winter floods wash away much of the vegetation. A similar situation may occur at Mugdrum Island. Many non-territorial birds in April are scattered in smaller groups at sites throughout the area including breeding sites where previous years' young may linger, but some of the newer water bodies have still to attract an April flock despite holding large winter numbers.

The Mute Swan population of Fife is at its highest recorded level. The establishment of new freshwater bodies and a series of relatively mild winters has undoubtedly assisted the expansion which has also occurred at the UK level (Ward *et al.* 2007, Massimino *et al.* 2017). As not all nesting sites or potential nesting sites are occupied every year, and new sites are occupied most years, then there is the possibility that the population could increase further.

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With such a long-term study many observers have been involved at various periods in providing observations of both breeding birds and April flock counts and have greatly assisted in making the study as thorough as possible. The following people are especially thanked for their support of the study over several years: George M. Adam, Malcolm J. Bayne, Stuart Bonar, Les Hatton, the late Mike Ramage, Richard Smith, Andre Thiel and Tony Wilson.

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Finally, thanks go to several organisations which provided grant aid at various times to assist with the costs of undertaking the study: Fife Council, the SOC (Endowment Fund Grant), Scottish Natural Heritage, the British Trust for Ornithology, ExxonMobil Chemical Olefins Inc. and Shell U.K. Exploration and Production.

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Plate 93. The derelict roofless outbuilding at Cuppin, Papa Westray, Orkney, May 2016; the Fulmars were trapped behind the main wall shown. © *Tim Dodman*

Fulmar deaths in a building on Papa Westray, Orkney

J. BRANSCOMBE, T. DODMAN, J.A. VAN FRANEKER & E.L. BRAVO REBOLLEDO

A large number of Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* corpses and a number of live Fulmars were found in Cuppin, an abandoned croft on Papa Westray, Orkney, in May 2016 (Plate 93). Attempts to renovate this croft had been abandoned about three years earlier. The birds were in a room approximately 5 m by 4 m, which had no roof, with walls to just over 2 m high, a closed door and one window which was still glassed (Plate 94). After the discovery of the birds, the door was left open and the window removed so that the surviving birds and any future birds entering the room could escape.

A week later, we sifted through the corpses, counting 469, of which 15 (3%) were ringed. The state of decomposition of some birds was such that the overall count must be viewed as a minimum. It is also possible that some rings were missing, as it was not easy to find legs on all the birds. The number of live birds and the number of apparently fresh corpses suggested that many of the birds had become trapped during 2016, but the levels of decay in some corpses suggested that some had died in an earlier year.

A return visit was made two days later to collect 170 of the fresher corpses for autopsy and analysis of stomach contents as part of an ongoing investigation into levels of ingested plastic in Fulmars over the North Sea area (Van Franeker *et al.* 2011). Most of these were in good enough condition to attempt internal assessment, which supports the suggestion that a large number of the birds were trapped within months of their discovery; 117 stomachs were collected and 84 birds could be sexed and aged.

The ringing returns were all of birds ringed in Orkney, on Papa Westray, North Ronaldsay, Eynhallow and Swona, with the exception of a single bird ringed in Caithness. Only three of the birds had been ringed as full-grown birds while the other 12 were ringed as nestlings; one bird having been ringed in 2008, two in 2009 and nine in 2010. This suggests that a large proportion of the birds were five to six years old when they were trapped in the building at Cuppin. Of the three birds ringed when full-grown, the Caithness bird was caught on 19 May 2014. The other two had been ringed when found grounded in North Ronaldsay, one on 8 September 2013 and one on 7 September 2015. These dates suggest they might have been fledglings from nearby nests, not yet able to fly properly. This mass mortality appears to have largely involved sub-adult birds. Fulmars start breeding between 6–12 years of age (Ollason & Dunnet 1978). From general prospecting of potential breeding areas in their youngest years, they gradually become involved in specific site and partner selection as sub-adults. The developmental stage of the female oviducts suggested that almost all of the birds that died in the building were sub-adults; judging from sexual organs, no first- or second-year birds were involved, although the single recovery of a bird ringed in 2015 suggest that this may have happened. Among the 84 corpses that could be sexed and aged, all 48 females were immatures and, among 36 males, 24 were certain immatures, others uncertain, but certainly not of adult breeding age. The absence of rings pre-dating 2008 also indicates that younger birds were largely involved.

We suggest that this mortality started with one or two birds entering the ruin, possibly prospecting for nest sites, to find that they were unable to get out given the height of the walls and the confined dimensions. We believe that the sight and sound of these birds then attracted others. There was one other unroofed and otherwise closed room on the property with no evidence of any Fulmars having entered it. However, this room was larger, with some roof timbers and debris hanging down from

Plate 94. Fulmar corpses litter the floor of the open-roofed enclosure, Cuppin, Papa Westray, Orkney, May 2016; note the window was previously intact. © *Tim Dodman*

the walls, both factors that could have enabled birds to escape. Occasional Fulmars have been found trapped before on Papa Westray, though never in such numbers, whilst Fulmars have also been reported trapped elsewhere. Anderson (1982) recorded 119 Fulmars caught over three years in a burnt-out building at Newburgh, Ythan estuary, Grampian measuring 8m by 15m with walls about 10 m high. The Fulmars used the walls of this building for display, and Anderson (1982) considered the main danger presented by the building was to prospecting birds. He also reported on 274 Fulmars trapped in planti-cruives (dry-stone enclosures) on North Ronaldsay between 1978 and 1980, with most entrapments occurring between January and May and in September; older corpse remains were also found in the enclosures. Macdonald (1982) reported 24 Fulmars trapped in a narrow pathway on Dornoch Cathedral, with the expectation that a single bird had become trapped, thereafter attracting the others.

We have no precise information on how long individuals survived in the building before dying of starvation or dehydration. In extreme cases, incubation shifts in tube-nosed birds of this size may be in excess of two weeks. However, even if initially trapped in excellent body condition, it seems unlikely that individual Fulmars in the building could have survived for much more than about three weeks.

Some of the corpses were autopsied to investigate the stomach contents (e.g. Plate 95). Data from autopsied birds have provided sex-specific size details that will assist in sexing birds handled alive, e.g. during ringing. Preliminary data from analyses of stomach contents suggest that about 90% of them contained plastic when they died. The average mass of plastic per individual (0.09 g; unpublished) appeared considerably less than is usually found in Fulmars beached or accidentally killed around the Scottish Islands (0.32 g; OSPAR 2017). Like house-trapped birds, most beached birds are emaciated, but where beached birds may have had the opportunity to ingest plastics from their surroundings until their final stages, this was not possible for the

Plate 95. Although the average plastic mass in the stomachs of these Fulmars was lower than in beached birds from around Orkney, some still showed an impressive level of plastic pollution. Fulmar number ORK-2016-089, an immature female, contained 1.186 g of plastics, a mix of industrial granules (lower left) and a variety of user plastics (sheet-like, threads, foamed and fragments). © *Jan van Franeker, WMR lab, Den Helder*

Fulmars trapped in the building. Through grinding and fragmentation in the muscular gizzard, it is thought that Fulmars can reduce plastics in the stomach by an estimated 75% per month (Van Franeker & Law 2015), which might explain the lowered plastic mass in the trapped birds.

We recommend that derelict properties should be checked for trapped Fulmars whenever possible. Closed roofless rooms should be opened by opening doors, removing windows or taking down sections of wall. Clearly, permissions may need to be sought. Given the apparent rapidity with which numbers can build up once some birds are trapped, checks should be carried out regularly.

The monitoring of plastics in stomachs of Fulmars, beached or otherwise found dead, is an ongoing programme over the UK. For Orkney, the local co-ordinator is Jenni Kakkonen (jenni.kakkonen@orkney.gov.uk; 07545 436 369). For addresses of other co-ordinators please contact jan.vanfraneker@wur.nl or suse.kuehn@wur.nl.

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Unusually small Greenshank

Plate 96 a–b. Small Greenshank, Garnock Estuary, Ayrshire, 15 September 2018. © *Tom Byars*

On 15 September 2018 at 11:48 hrs, while searching for passage waders using my 30x telescope on the upper Garnock Estuary, Ayrshire, I came across an unusual looking wader, c. 60 m away, roosting on a small seaweed covered islet, mid channel on the River Garnock at low tide (Plate 96a–b). My first impression was of a small slender wader with long olive grey legs, showing a sliver of extensive white on the lower back, dull grey upperparts with the beak tucked under the back feathers and scapulars. With no other wader species around for comparison, it was difficult to estimate size, but it looked far too small for a Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* and my mind conjured up exciting thoughts of Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*. That initial excitement was quickly dispelled within four minutes as the wader awoke to a Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* alarm call and revealed a rather large, slightly upturned beak - at complete odds with the petite body frame. Just a Greenshank then - albeit a diminutive one!

A couple of calling Greenshank then flew close by and the smaller individual flew off to join them on the far side of the channel. In flight, the size difference was immediately apparent but on landing alongside, the comparison was astonishing. This bird was around 30% smaller than the other two Greenshanks, with a body shape closer in bulk to that of a Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*. At first, I thought

Plate 97. Greenshanks (including small individual, second from right) with Curlews, Guardbridge, Eden Estuary, Fife, 13 September 2018. © *Barry Farquharson*

this bird might have been a runt but, on closer inspection through the scope and reviewing hand held digiscoped images, I could easily make out the sharply demarcated black blotching on the feather centres to the upper scapulars, indicating a post-breeding adult moulting into winter plumage. This diminutive Greenshank was last seen by Gordon McAdam in the same vicinity on 20 September.

Interestingly, when posting this observation on social media, I was contacted by Barry Farquharson who sent me a picture of a small Greenshank he had photographed roosting at Guardbridge, Eden Estuary, Fife, on 13 September (Plate 97) which he too initially thought was a Marsh Sandpiper. Could this bird have been the same individual?

Greenshank eggs can vary between individual females, with the mean mass of eggs in clutches ranging from 22.7 g to 35.7 g (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1979, Table 19). Thus, it is possible that the small Greenshank resulted from an unusually small egg.

Reference

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Violent territorial defence by a Curlew

During the non-breeding season (late summer to early spring), Curlews *Numenius arquata* occupy single ownership territories in the intertidal zone at the coast (Ens 1979, Ens & Zwarts 1980). These provide exclusive feeding areas across the low tide period. To defend their territories against con-specifics, owners use two common forms of aggressive behaviour. At the boundary of territories, neighbours come together and walk side by side over several metres (Plate 98, Ens & Zwarts 1980, reviewed in Cramp & Simmons 1983). During such parallel-walks, they often lunge at and peck pieces of seaweed and sea-shells (Ens 1979). This behaviour can be regarded as re-directed aggression. After several minutes (it can be up to 20 minutes, Cramp & Simmons 1983) of re-asserting their mutual boundary, the two birds part and resume foraging.

Territory owners tend to forage well down the shore, following the water's edge as the tide ebbs and flows. This means that non-territorial birds have the chance to forage in territories, but high on the shore (pers. obs.). Such intrusions may be temporarily tolerated, but territory owners eventually chase off intruders by either walking, running (with head lowered) or flying towards the intruder, who retreat by similarly walking, running or flying away (Ens & Zwarts 1980). The success of such chases is often followed by the bubbling call (also known as yodelling) by the territory owner.

Neither of these two types of territorial defence involves physical contact. There is clearly an advantage in avoiding fights because these could lead to life-threatening injuries, such as damage to the bill. This does not mean that fights do not occur. On 1 February 2019, shortly after high tide in the Beauly Firth (Ross-shire), I watched an encounter between a territory holder and an intruder that did lead to violence. Bird A (a female) had occupied its territory since at least 2013 and, over the years, I had seen boundary conflicts (parallel-walking) with its neighbours B (a female) and C (a male) on either side of A's territory (Plate 98). Birds A–C had unique permutations of colour rings and had been sexed on bill length when ringed (Summers *et al.* 2013). The current event occurred at the boundary of birds A and B, but in the absence of bird B. The tide was still high and it is likely that bird B was still at its high tide roost and therefore not defending its territory.

The intruder (un-ringed, but sexed as a male on its relative bill size and adult on plumage) and bird A were seen a few metres apart and performing typical boundary defence behaviour. They approached closely and walked slowly back and forth, including parallel-walking. Both lunged at and pecked seaweed (Plates 99 and 100). This close posturing lasted approximately 10 minutes, culminating in a stand-off (Plate 101) and preparation to fight. Although both readied to fight with flexed wings (Plate 102), it was bird A that drove home attacks by lunging and pecking with its bill at the body of the intruder, who backed off (Plates 103 a–c). There were two separate bouts of fierce attack by bird A, after which the two birds parted. As the two birds slowly parted, bird A raised its body feathers (Plate 104).

Two days later (3 February) around high tide, a male (assumed to be the same bird) was in the same part of the shore where the encounter had taken place, and territory holders A and B were also present in their territories. On 4 February, the male was foraging across the inter-tidal zone at low tide in the boundary region of birds A and B, and approximately 30 m from B. Bird A was at the far end of its territory, but it could presumably see the intruder, but there were no aggressive encounters. On 12 and 13 February at low tide, the male was not seen.

Fights between Curlews are uncommon (Ens 1979), so the event requires a possible interpretation. I suspect that the intruder was in the initial stages of territory acquisition, and attempting to squeeze in between two long-

Plate 98. Curlews A and B (both female) parallel-walking at their mutual territorial boundary, Beauly Firth, Highland, 9 February 2014. © *Ron Summers*

Plate 99. The territory owner (bird A) lunges at and pecks vigorously at a clump of seaweed in an act of redirected aggression, Beauly Firth, Highland, 1 February 2019. © *Ron Summers*

Plate 100. The territory owner (bird A) pecking at a strand of Knotted Wrack *Asophyllum nodosum*. 1 February 2019. © *Ron Summers*

Plate 101. The birds stand-off. The territory owner (a female), with neck extended, is on the left and intruding male on the right. The size difference between the sexes is clear. 1 February 2019. © *Ron Summers*

Plate 102. The two birds prepare to fight by flexing their wings. Note also the fanned tails. 1 February 2019. © *Ron Summers*

Plate 104. The territory owner departs from the conflict with raised feathers. 1 February 2019. © *Ron Summers*

Plates 103 a–c. The territory owner (left) lunges at and pecks the body of the intruder who does not retaliate but backs away. 1 February 2019. © *Ron Summers*

standing (since at least 2013) territories occupied by birds A and B. Its absence on 12 and 13 February suggests it was unsuccessful.

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Paul Haworth 1951–2018

Plate 105. Paul Haworth on Mull. © *Alan Fielding*

Paul Haworth, who has died aged 67, was a gifted field naturalist and talented ecologist. He was uniquely committed to understanding the ecology and conservation of birds of prey, and made key inroads in advancing how we should care for the uplands.

His field expertise led to four avenues of research. He was regularly commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to survey remote areas of the Highlands and Islands to plot the nesting sites of rare raptors, especially eagles, Hen Harriers and Merlins. Cultivating trusted friendships with local raptor workers, Paul amassed huge data sets on the birds. He discovered higher densities of birds than previously realised, resulting in the designation of areas such as North Harris Mountains as an EC Special Protection Area for Golden Eagles. Aware of the spread of wind farms, and the questions they posed about impacts on birds, he developed a commercial business to advise developers, conservation bodies and government agencies on this, at times managing more than twenty field staff. Quick to point out to developers that they might not get what they wanted, and would do better looking elsewhere or scaling back their plans, Paul became the 'go-to' expert. He commanded considerable authority, appearing at Local Public Inquiries as an Expert Witness, but also as the co-author of official guidance on wind farms.

In establishing 'Highland Renewal', an education and arts charity managing the revival of a wildwood on Tireragan estate on Mull, Paul worked closely with Alan Fielding. They formed a formidable team. In 1999, they published the textbook *Upland Habitats*, dedicated to Derek Ratcliffe. Beginning with the words "Wild, empty, bleak, desolate, hostile ...", they went on to share their enjoyment from studying these special places. With Phil Whitfield, Paul and Alan led work devising 'conservation frameworks' for Golden Eagles (2008) and Hen Harriers (2011). This fourth area of work set the standard for conserving and managing these raptors. More recent work focused on satellite-tagged Golden Eagles, revealing significant losses of birds on driven grouse moors. Their 2017 report led to the formation by the Scottish Government of a group to look critically at the practices of grouse moor management; it should report in spring 2019.

Paul was a proud Lancastrian from Oswaldtwistle, near Blackburn, where he met his wife, Trish. They travelled to Connemara, where her parents lived, and in the wild sweeps of bogland and mountain, Paul found nearly 30 Merlin nests. He first studied for a BSc Geology degree followed by a Masters in Landscape Ecology. Initially, he worked as a professional ecologist for Welsh Water and West Yorkshire County Council. His PhD examined factors influencing the distribution and densities of nesting birds in the South Pennines close to his home town. Awarded a

doctorate in 1987 from what is now Manchester Metropolitan University, important papers from his thesis drew on what became an obsession - finding nesting Merlins.

After part-time teaching in Manchester he worked for SNH on Orkney. He moved to Mull in 1990 to lead a SNH-funded project under David Houston at the University of Glasgow on factors influencing scavenging and predatory birds. He established himself as a freelance ecologist. A skilled builder, woodsman and horticulturalist, he created an Arcadia which became home to family, friends and hundreds of academics, field workers and students. After making a living from educating groups from the environmental charity Earthwatch, Paul developed a work force to gather data on the distribution and ranging behaviour of raptors, especially Golden Eagles.

Research was nurtured through frequent gatherings in Paul's abode to the accompaniment of an eclectic mix of music and good food (Paul was a fine cook). These gatherings engendered close friendships. Ever patient, Trish perfected the art of coaxing the best from the entourage, an unconventional but effective model of how creative work should be done.

Paul's Irish experience proved invaluable in the work of the Golden Eagle Trust reintroducing birds to Ireland, and subsequent reintroductions of White-tailed Eagles and Red Kites. Paul helped Scotland donate birds to Ireland, with up to 30 birds now being monitored. Paul and Alan published a report on the status of Golden Eagles in the south of Scotland, which led to a Heritage Lottery Funded project to release birds in 2018 to reinforce the small population there.

Working with the Forestry Commission for Scotland, SNH, raptor conservation and forestry bodies, Paul was active in guiding the management of upland and forested areas for Hen Harriers. On Mull, and some other Hebridean islands, Paul noted an increase in nesting harriers, possibly in response to birds deserting mainland grouse moors, or reflecting a shift in range westwards. Some woodland areas regarded as unsuitable are proving attractive to harriers - something that excited Paul, as he enjoyed watching harriers and Merlins settle on Tireragan. In his last year surveying harriers on Mull, he spent more than 60 days in the field and found more than 40 nests.

Always supportive of other fieldworkers, Paul formed a strong partnership with Robin Reid. Robin has featured on BBC Alba, but what has not featured are the many visits he and Paul made to eagle nests, with black bin bags to collect prey remains for analyses to determine prey composition. Dom Morgan, Scott Smith and Aidan McCormick were other great field companions, and follow in Paul's footsteps.

Paul could be mischievous in meetings. Frequent asides amused colleagues, and whispered conversations with the chair, resulted in welcome phases of levity. Softly and plainly spoken, intelligent and piercingly observant of people, social and environmental issues, Paul was happiest with his family and in small groups. Cooking and listening to Celtic music played loudly were enjoyed, but not so being teased about the failings of Blackburn Rovers or the cheeriness of Leonard Cohen! Unorthodox, resourceful, understatedly talented in managing difficult situations, and faithful to friendship, Paul embodied a humanitarian ethos. He energised colleagues to make a difference for birds of prey in upland Scotland.

Friends were shocked to hear of Paul's untimely death from cancer when he had so much still to give, but we know he had a long, influential and exciting field trip of his own choosing. We were unsurprised to learn that, towards the end, he was totally at peace as he reflected on a life doing what he loved. Paul is survived by his wife Trish, children Kathryn and Erica, grandchildren Carys and Fionn, and field companion Bam.

Alan Fielding, Lorcan O'Toole, Des Thompson & Phil Whitfield

Plate 106. David Jardine introduces the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Corran Halls. © *David Palmar*

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Oban, 16 March 2019

On a damp, murky morning, around 230 delegates and staff gathered at the Corran Halls on Oban's seafront for this year's event, themed *Wings over Western Skies* and jointly organised by SOC, BTO and Argyll Bird Club. The venue was (just) large enough to cope with the record number of attendees, with ample space for exhibitors' stalls that ranged from wildlife artists and antiquarian books to local and national wildlife organisations.

SOC President Ian Bainbridge was unfortunately unwell, so David Jardine opened the proceedings in his capacity as Vice Chair of the Argyll Bird Club, welcoming everybody to Oban and reminding delegates that it had been seven years since the conference was last held on the west coast of Scotland. Against a backdrop of visually ingenious slides themed on OS maps, David spoke of the work that had gone into the SOC's soon-to-be-launched *Where to Watch Birds in Scotland* app. He also mentioned the fire that had recently destroyed Fair Isle Bird Observatory, announcing that the conference raffle takings would be donated to the FIBO Trust, and that a card was available at the SOC stall for delegates to sign with messages of support to the observatory staff. Professor Jane Reid, a FIBO Director, later explained that the Trust's insurers were already on the case, and that it was planned to rebuild the observatory, hopefully within two years. David then introduced the first of the day's eight speakers.

It's tough for Choughs: ecology, genetics and conservation of Red-billed Choughs in Scotland

Jane Reid (University of Aberdeen)

Our charismatic corvid appears fated to extinction unless saved by successful artificial intervention, so explained Professor of Population Ecology, Jane Reid, overcoming the underlying complex issues in a lucid exposition of research findings and conclusions.

A study has run since 1983. A ringing scheme produced 130,000 sightings providing an excellent data set. Insufficient surviving young to sustain the population was found to be the main problem. While a juvenile surviving the end of its year of birth was likely to survive into spring, overall ninety percent failed to survive their first winter. There followed a critical shortfall of birds of breeding age, two or three years old. The cause was lack in late summer and early autumn of the main food item, tipulid larvae. Intervention taken by feeding mealworms countered this mortality.

Another problem was a lethal mutant gene causing blindness then death at fledging of 25% of chicks. Immigrants could restore genetic regularity but would require supporting habitat. Choughs require pasture of low intensity agriculture and dunes. Agricultural development schemes can threaten this. Intervention could ensure availability of this habitat. Some breeders now nest in buildings. A purpose-built 'hut nest box' has been used, showing another possible intervention route.

Professor Reid outlined a possible solution based on these intervention modes. Audience views were sought by questionnaire. This made a constructive and inspiring conclusion to a poignant talk and created hope that this inoffensive, elegant and engaging bird may foreseeably continue to ride the winds under western skies.

Sandy Mitchell

Plate 107. Jane Reid. © *David Palmar*

Plate 108. Lila Buckingham. © *David Palmar*

Putting auks on the map: a multi-colony tracking study of winter ranges

Lila Buckingham (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology)

Lila's PhD study involves deploying geolocator tags onto breeding Guillemots and Razorbills at colonies around the northern UK in order to better understand where different populations (colonies) and individuals spend the winter. The impetus for this investigation, funded by Vattenfall, has been the proliferation of offshore wind farms, particularly in the southern North Sea, and the potential some of these installations may have for displacing auks from key feeding areas.

In 2017, tags were fitted to Guillemots and Razorbills breeding at Canna, Foula, Fair Isle, Orkney, east Caithness, Whinnyfold and Isle of May, and the data from those retrieved in 2018 showed interesting differences between colonies. Canna Guillemots largely wintered off western Scotland, relatively close to the colony, whereas Foula and Fair Isle birds made extensive post-breeding movements both to the north (as far as the Barents Sea) and to the south. Those breeding in Orkney and along the east coast of Scotland had large overlaps in winter distribution in the southern North Sea. For Razorbills, although some Canna birds remained relatively close to the colony, most tagged birds spent much of their non-breeding season in the southern North Sea.

More tags were deployed in summer 2018, including on the Shiants, Treshnish Isles and Colonsay, time depth recorders were added to the technological micro-packages, while feather samples from recaptured birds will provide data on winter diet and any sex differences.

Martin Heubeck

The population status and conservation needs of Corncrake in Scotland

Bridget England (RSPB Scotland)

Corncrakes are closely associated with active low input/output farming systems on fertile grasslands managed by people, human activity thus benefiting wildlife. As the RSPB Species Lead for Corncrake, Bridget collaborates with land owners and managers to assess and modify agricultural practice using policy and advocacy to improve nesting habitat throughout the species' breeding range. Agricultural intensification (fertilization leading to species impoverishment of hay meadows, early mechanized cutting for silage using faster tractors in larger fields), has resulted in massive range contraction - from a 19th century distribution across the UK, to just the far northern and western isles of Scotland today.

The primary requirement for breeding birds is cover - early tall herbs in April/May, then hayfields for rearing up to two broods. To maintain a stable population, this short-lived species requires an annual productivity of four chicks per hen. Since 84% of birds breed outside nature reserves, both cooperation with farmers and community engagement are vital. Conservation efforts focus on modifying cutting methods (from the field centre outwards to avoid trapping young birds) and encouraging later harvests so that older chicks can avoid the cutter. Conservation measures are highly successful: in five years 400–600 calling males in the 1990s (1,000 ha farmland managed for conservation) increased to around 1,000–1,200 birds (5,000 ha managed by 2003). However, while populations in the Uists and Tiree remain strong, declines are evident on Islay and Coll, while Orkney and Lewis retain few birds. Ongoing geolocator studies are identifying migration routes and destinations to help pinpoint threats away from breeding sites. Main threats here include further intensification and habitat fragmentation, loss of extensive cattle-based systems, climate change and potential loss of EU subsidy payments through Brexit.

Anne Westerberg

Plate 109. Bridget England. © *David Palmar*

Paul Haworth - a lifetime of raptor research

Alan Fielding (Independent Conservation Data Analyst)

This talk was given as a tribute to Paul Haworth, who sadly passed away in 2018 (an obituary appears on pages 140–141 of this issue). He was a very popular man as well as wonderful conservationist. Paul undertook extensive research in conservation of Merlin, Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle and produced many papers, including several in collaboration with Alan Fielding.

Paul was instrumental in re-introducing Golden Eagle to Ireland and was part of the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project in 2013. It is largely due to his work that it has become a requirement for companies setting up windfarms to contribute to research. One example is the Monadhliaths, where the number of occupied territories of raptors has increased. Other good sites are on Uist, Mull and Arran, as well as some parts of the Argyll mainland. In 2016, there were 42 nests on the Isle of Mull.

There is a charity called Highland Renewal, which was set up by Paul and which is based at Tireragan, Mull. There has been no grazing or

nown present to an unknowable future, according to
ories about the causal relationships between certain
logical variables which are hotly disputed by academic
logists and may in fact change from country to country
n decade to decade." (Dennis Healy)
(20/12/2013)

Plate 110. Alan Fielding. © *David Palmar*

Plate 111. John Calladine. © *David Palmar*

burning of heather here for over 20 years, and the population of Hen Harrier has increased - the birds nest in heather, Bog Myrtle and other scrub. This is also an area that does not have grouse shooting. The Atlantic oak woodland is also beneficial and it is hoped that a training centre can be created here, so that bird ringing and fitting of satellite devices can be studied.

Alan ended by announcing that a celebration of Paul's life will be held at Creich Hall, Mull, on 27 and 28 July 2019.

Sarah Graham

Tracking Short-eared Owls and other attempts to understand them

John Calladine (BTO Scotland)

John took us into the world of the Short-eared Owl and gave us an eye opener to this largely nocturnal species which we love to see, but don't have that experience of doing so very often. His fieldwork, which included following seven birds using GPS satellite tracking, is very much cutting edge work on a poorly understood species whose range is currently contracting.

Vole occurrence and a negative association with forestry expansion were highlighted. The species favours open habitat with grassland being preferred to heather. Predation is also a constraint. They avoid interaction with Golden Eagle, and in Orkney the introduction of Stoats has seen numbers of the owl decline dramatically.

The movements of the individual birds were fascinating, with one female possibly recorded breeding twice in a single season at sites 1,000 km apart in Scotland and Norway. One male was followed until the signal was lost at Pratt's Bottom in London!

Although the Short-eared Owl and Kestrel have the capacity to build up their populations when conditions are good, detecting the birds is a huge issue in the case of the former. John's dedication to this challenging species was apparent and his presentation certainly shed a lot of light on this elusive bird.

Gordon Riddle

What can be achieved in one week every year?

Robin Ward (Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group)

The Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group, (TIARG), has visited the Treshnish islands since 1971, usually in the last week of June. Since 1994, an annual seabird census, followed by systematic ringing of specific seabird colonies, has monitored movement and survival rates. Up to 2,000 birds are ringed annually including Puffins, Razorbill, Guillemot, Fulmar, Storm Petrel, Kittiwake, Herring Gull and Shag. The results contribute nationally to The Seabird Monitoring Programme and locally informs the Hebridean Trust's management of the islands. Ringing and recoveries help assess the impact of new developments, such as wind farms, on bird

Plate 112. Robin Ward. © *David Palmar*

populations and the subsequent implications for colonies. The census data indicates how overall populations are faring, gives further indication of survival rates and helps to detect how environmental changes, (e.g. variations in food supply), may be affecting the birds.

Population changes between 1994 and 2000 show marked declines in Kittiwake, Fulmar, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull, whilst Guillemot and Puffin have been more stable. Shag showed a marked decline, but have recently increased. Other avian species, land and marine mammals, insects and flora have also been recorded.

TIARG has some 50 volunteers for around the UK. They continue to refine and standardise survey techniques, develop observer skills and efforts, and refine the methods used for 'difficult' species. Seabird numbers are monitored in relation to visitor pressure, management policies and invasive mammalian predators. At the same time, continuing technical advances improve the accuracy and resolution of the collected data. Further information about the project is available at the group's website: www.tiarg.org

Hilary Maxfield

Sea Eagles and livestock: resolving the conflict

Ross Lilley (Scottish Natural Heritage)

Ross commenced by changing the title, a small change but telling, from "…Resolving the conflict." To "…Managing the conflict." Making that change emphasised the difficulties of managing the large number of stakeholders, individuals and large organisations, from conservation bodies to hill farms, all with strongly held opinions about re-introducing a predator into a country not used to this particular one. The conflict mostly revolves around sheep where loss of lambs has a direct impact on livelihoods. But first, the nature and extent of the problem needs to be properly defined. Remains of lambs are undoubtedly associated with White-tailed Eagle nests, but a rarer find is that of a carcass which may (as graphically illustrated) show signs of attack with intent to kill, as well as subsequent attack by scavengers. Also to be determined is whether this could be regular behaviour or the aberrant behaviour of a few. The situation from the point of view of the farmer, attentive to the lambing ewes in inbye was fully explained. Then trial of possible deterrent or mitigating measures, that might work well enough in controlled conditions in the inbye but not so well on the open hillside.

Perhaps, too, the conflict of interest goes right up to the Scottish Government, keen for Scottish farming to be successful, and also for the nation to be a world leader in biodiversity.

Plate 113. Ross Lilley. © *David Palmar*

Coming after a series of talks of species declining, this was a story of a species doing well, expanding in numbers of birds and of territories occupied; an upbeat message hopefully anticipating a re-instatement of the original title, '…Resolving the conflict."

Jeff Banks

Wildlife filming on the west coast and the Hebrides

John Aitchison (Wildlife Cameraman)

At the end of a day when many of the species discussed seemed to be in some sort of trouble, it fell to John to remind us why we became interested in birds and wildlife in the first place. From 2012, he had been involved in filming for the BBC series *Hebrides: Islands on the edge* and we were treated to many of the best clips. Fortunately for modern cameramen, elaborate hides, such as artificial cows, as used by Cherry Kearton and others of his era, have now been replaced by more convenient methods of concealment or even cars. Miniature cameras connected by a long cable have also enabled intimate pictures; as John's superb portrait of a Redstart family in an Atlantic oakwood so well illustrated.

Plate 114. John Aitchison. © *David Palmar*

Long hours filming can be rewarded by unexpected events, such as when the success of a breeding pair of Red-throated Divers on a Lewis lochan was threatened by the arrival of an aggressive Black-throated Diver. The subsequent skirmishes were presented by the BBC for maximum dramatic effect with the incumbent pair emerging victorious at the end. Another surprise was the sudden appearance of a Ferret among the breeding waders on a Uist machair, with the predictable result. However, this story also had a (sort of) happy ending when the Ferret, which was obviously used to people, allowed itself to be trapped under a parabolic reflector.

Puffins and Bonxies on Sule Skerry, distillery Swallows on Islay, White-tailed Eagles on Mull and a reminder of the fragility of many seabed communities finished the day in fine style.

Roger Hissett

Plate 115. Ben Darvill announcing the raffle. © *David Palmar*

All too soon, it was time to draw the prizes for the raffle, which raised a very respectable £976. The local organisers had amassed a generous selection of prizes, and in light of the destination of the proceeds, nobody amongst the majority was too miffed that one of their numbers wasn't drawn!

This was my first Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference and I can honestly say I thoroughly enjoyed it; the eight speakers combined to deliver a varied, informative and entertaining programme of high quality talks, the audio-visuals

Plate 116. Audience question time. © *David Palmar*

were flawless, the session Chairs (David Jardine, Nigel Scriven, Ben Darvill and Chris Wernham) kept things tightly to schedule while allowing time for questions, and there was plenty of time at the coffee and lunch breaks for the socialising, which is such a big part of a one-day event.

In her closing remarks, Head of BTO Scotland, Chris Wernham, drew attention to some of the dilemmas that had been highlighted in the talks. Choughs and Corncrakes require different habitats to maintain their populations in the few places where they currently co-exist in Scotland,

Plate 117. David Jardine. © *David Palmar*

Plate 118. Nigel Scriven. © *David Palmar*

Plate 119. Chris Wernham. © *David Palmar*

which poses a dilemma for conservation managers. Renewable energy schemes are undoubtedly needed to tackle global warming, but just how much of the North Sea can be covered in wind farms before foraging options for seabirds are affected negatively? While the reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles to Scotland has been a huge conservation (and economic) success, localised conflicts with sheep farming can be genuine and require a considerable effort by all parties to resolve.

Finally, Chris began a long list of thanks. Firstly to BTO volunteers, not least for having surveyed a record 580 Breeding Bird Survey squares in Scotland in 2018! The conference organisers, speakers and exhibitors were thanked, as were the raffle prize donors. Stephen Hunter got a special mention for creating the imaginative background slides, while David Palmar was thanked for kindly agreeing once again to be the conference photographer. The administrative staff, AV team and caterers at Corran Halls had all made the day go smoothly, while advance thanks went to those who had organised that evening's communal meals at different restaurants in Oban, and the leaders of the field trips the following day, including the Mull Bird Club. Finally, Chris announced that the 2020 Scottish Birdwatcher's Conference would be held in Elgin.

Sunday was a cold, blustery day with sunny spells and occasional showers driving in from the northwest. No less than six different field trips were on offer, exploring the islands and coastline around Loch Linnhe and the Firth of Lorne. I joined the group crossing over to Mull, where we joined members of Mull Bird Club on one of their regular weekend outings. The main targets were the Golden Eagles and White-tailed Eagles for which the island is now well known and virtually every stop and scan during the day produced one or other of the species, with other highlights being a hunting Hen Harrier and a couple of playful Otters. It was a great finale to a very enjoyable weekend.

Martin Heubeck

Plate 120. Four White-tailed Eagles, Sound of Mull. © *David Palmar*

NEWS AND NOTICES

New Members

Ayrshire: Mr D. Mackintosh, Mr & Mrs R. Pirrie, Ms S. Wheeler, Mr R. Yates, **Borders:** Mr R. Bramhall, Mr C. Gray, Mr M. Hughes, Mrs H. Johnston & Mr B. Rowles, Mr C. Ralley, **Caithness:** Ms S. Edwards & Mr D. Clarke, **Central Scotland:** Mr G. Rosevear, Ms M. Scott, **Clyde:** Mr J. Agnew, Miss E. Anderson, Mr A. Cameron, Mr A. Cowan, Mr A. Ferry, Ms D. Gaffney, Mr R. Graham, Mr R. Macaskill, Mr & Mrs A. Martinelli, Mr D. Mullen, Drs J. & J. Newton, Dr A. Owsianka, Mr A. Savage, Mr G. Wardrope, Mr B. Wright, **Dumfries:** Dr S. Grieve, Mrs E. Kilpatrick, Mr C. Pierson-Harvey, Mr S. Rutt & Ms M. Cichy, Mr A. Turney, **England, Wales & NI:** Ms S. Byron, Mr J. Dawon, Mr S. Halligan, Mrs A. Mansfield, Mr J. Miles, Mr B. Newman, Miss C. Roberts, **Fife:** Mr K. Fyfe, Ms J. Hendry, Miss E. Moreland, Ms K. Schuessler, **Highland:** Mr S. Broyd, Mr J. Cromarty, Mr E. Cusack, Mr M. Fearn & Ms J. Fildes, Mrs A. Fraser, Mr D. Geddes, Mr C. Hughes, Ms S. Leiper, Mrs S. Lynch, Mr A. Miller, Mr S. Reddick, Mr & Mrs N. Revell, Ms H. Ritchie, **Lothian:** Mr & Mrs J. Armstrong, Mr & Mrs C. Ashurst, Mr D. Barton, Mr & Mrs G. Broad, Mrs P. Bruno-Grieve & Mr S. Grieve, Mr C. Burgess, Ms T. Burnet, Mr & Mrs J. Carson, Ms C. Crack, Mr W. Crook & Ms D. Jackson, Mrs C. Devine, Mrs C. Dickson & Mr M. Beveridge, Ms A. Durie, Mrs B. Fraser, Mr C. Giles, Dr T. Hodge, Miss E. Hodgson, Mr & Mrs R. Hollingdale, Miss H. Humphreys, Mr N. Hunter, Mrs A. Hyatt, Mr J. Jarvie, Mr J. Kalcsics, Mrs A. Law, Dr & Mrs A. Lessells, Miss S. Lyall, Mr C. Macefield, Mr N. Mitchell, Mr R. Moore, Mr D. Mullen, Ms D. Peasgood, Miss M. Riaza Sanchez, Ms P. Rogers, Mr & Mrs A. Sibbald, Mr B. Sloan, Mr & Mrs D. Spiers, Mr C. Swinton, Mr B. Wallace, **Moray:** Mrs L. Potter, Mr J. Spencer, Mrs S. Storey, Mrs A. Watson, **North-East Scotland:** Ms J. Allam, Mr S. Hardie, Mr L. Park, **Orkney:** Mr B. Cockerham, Mrs J. Fryer, Mr G. Walker, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr J. Aitchison, Mr D. Foyster, Mr L. Johnson, Mr W. Miles, Mr K. Wilson, **Stewartry:** Ms E. Elliot-McColl & Mr P. Robinson, Mr J. Foster, Mr D Henshilwood, Mr E. Tooth & Ms L. Blakely, Mr C. Walton & Mr T. Ellis, **Tayside:** Mr M. Heubeck, Ms J. McKenzie, Mr W. Morris, Mr D. Sillito, Mr G. Yarnell, **West Galloway:** Mr D. Baillie, Mr W. Cluckie.

Dates for your diary!

SOC Annual Conference and AGM

22–24 November 2019, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry. Programme and booking information enclosed.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

21 March 2020, Elgin Town Hall.

Waterston House

Art exhibitions

'Over Land and Sea' 25 May to 3 July - This exhibition brings together three painters, Tim Wootton, Darren Rees and Daniel Cole, and a sculptor, Simon Griffiths. They share an all-encompassing approach to their subject, aiming to capture a whole scene with much emphasis placed on the landscape/seascape elements of their work. All are established wildlife artists and members of the Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA). Tim Wootton draws inspiration from the wildlife of Orkney, where he lives. His work is rooted in field observation and translated in a wide range of media from oils to acrylic and watercolour. Darren Rees is based in Stirling but

Plate 121. Waxwings in fuchsia. © *Tim Wootton*

Plate 122. Time Lapse. © *Ben Woodhams*

travels the world studying wildlife as an artist and as a guide. His work is influenced by these wide-ranging trips, from the Arctic to North and South America, without neglecting the beauty on his doorstep. Daniel Cole, is based in Cornwall. Alongside intimate studies of birds, Daniel creates sweeping paintings that give a bird's-eye view of the landscape and seascape. Simon Griffiths is based in County Durham. He works in ceramics producing pieces that also aim to place the animal in context - perching on a log or a fence post, for example. The sculptures complement perfectly a show that is focused on capturing life unfolding at a particular moment.

Kyst (Coast), 6 July to 28 August - Kyst is a solo exhibition by Ben Woodhams SWLA and the result of an ambitious project carried out by the artist over the course of 2018. Every Friday in 2018, Ben walked a section of the coast of his island home, Bornholm, in Denmark. Covering a relatively short distance each time, he sketched, from dawn to dusk, the landscape, wildlife and human activity he encountered. Ben explains: "During the course of the journey, I passed through rocky deserted shores, sandy tourist-filled beaches and built-up areas of modern housing. In midsummer, I was out for over 18 hours and in winter considerably less." Throughout the year and as he walked on, Ben recorded the passage of time, the changes in the weather, the arrival and departure of migratory birds, as well as changes to human activity. Ben is "fascinated by the way in which looking - really looking - creates a deep connection with our environment". This is a feeling that all observers of nature will recognise and which is captured in a particularly poetic way by this exhibition.

Group exhibition by Nik Pollard, Laura Scouller, sculptor Helen Denerley and work by the late Greg Poole SWLA, Saturday 31 August to Wednesday 9 October.

Optics demo day

Sunday 22 September, 10 am–4 pm, Free Event
Looking for your first pair of binoculars? Or thinking of an upgrade? Come along to our annual spring optics day to try out a wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try out in field conditions. Or pop in for some free, friendly expert advice. If there are any models that you are particularly interested in looking at, please let us know in advance and we will do our best to have these available for you to try at the event. Call the office on 01875 871330 or email birdingofficer@the-soc.org.uk

Goose watch events

Illustrated talk: Thursday 26 September & Tuesday 1 October, 5.30pm, £10 (SOC members £8)

Guided walk: Saturday 28 September, 6.45am. Learn about the migrating geese that descend on the country each autumn. The illustrated talk will be given by Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve warden, John Harrison (East Lothian Council) and will be followed by a chance to watch the birds fly in to roost on the bay. Meanwhile, the early morning walk provides an opportunity to view the geese leave the roost site to go out and feed in the surrounding farmland. Price for the talk or walk is £10.00 (£8.00 SOC members), which includes refreshments. Places are limited so advance booking essential. For more information and to book, visit www.the-soc.org.uk/support-us/events or call the office on 01875 871330.

Branch updates

Lothian branch

New secretary - Alison Creamer, 12 Glencairn Terrace, Bathgate, EH48 4DL, Tel 07815 037330, Email lothiansecretary@the-soc.org.uk Alison takes over from outgoing secretary, Morag King. Council thanks Morag for her role in assisting with branch operations over the past two years.

Highland branch

Change of email address for recorder, Peter Stronach: highlandrecorder@protonmail.com

North-east Scotland

New recorder - Ian Broadbent, Tel 07790562892, Email nescotlandrecorder@the-soc.org.uk Ian takes over from Nick Littlewood, who recently moved away from the region. Council thanks Nick for his six years in the role.

For full branch committee updates, visit the 'Local Branches' page of SOC website www.the-soc.org.uk

Research & Surveys Committee

Tom Dougall retires

Tom stepped down as Chair in April after serving on the committee for some 20 years. Council is grateful to Tom for his long-standing dedication to the team, which has seen him preside over the allocation of SOC research grants to hundreds of amateur Scottish bird studies over the years. Colin Corse has taken over as chair and the committee also welcomes two new members, Bob Furness and Ron Summers.

This year's research and surveys grants

The total amount of funding awarded by the Club for the current 2019/20 period was £2,230, with the following projects supported:

- Study of breeding Honey-buzzards in Central Scotland (Central Scotland Honey Buzzard Group)
- Water Rails breeding in the Tay Reedbeds (Derek Robertson)
- Quandale skua study, Rousay, Orkney (Helen and David Aiton)
- Wader numbers on Sanday, Orkney (Highland and Orkney Ringing Groups)

SBRC - seeking a new committee member

The Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) is seeking a new member to replace Martin Scott, who retires later this year. To maintain geographical representation across Scotland SBRC would prefer a candidate from northern areas of Scotland. Any potential candidates should send their name to the Secretary (Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk). If more than one name is put forward, a ballot will be instigated, with Local Recorders having one vote each.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC

Lothian Bird Report

Three new issues of *Lothian Bird Report* (covering 2014, 2015, and 2016) were published in March, and for the first time, the reports are printed in full colour. At the time

of writing, copies are available from Waterston House as well as Viking Optical Centre, 101 Rose Street, Edinburgh (please call ahead before travelling). The reports are priced at £10 each or £20 for the set of three (2014–16). The reports can also be ordered by post (p&p charges apply - see below). Please send a cheque payable to 'SOC Lothian Branch' to: Gillian Herbert, 19 Cammo Grove, Edinburgh EH4 8EX.

Postage and packaging. UK: £1.60 for one report, or £3.20 for up to four reports. If ordering more than four reports or ordering from outside the UK, please visit the SOC website for more detailed pricing information: www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network/areas/lothian

Arran Bird Report 2018

Produced by the Arran Natural History Society, the latest report is a 'must' for anyone interested in the island's birds. It includes information on all species seen on Arran, a month-by-month summary of what was around last year, the impact of weather on birds, information on ringed individuals, reports on some of Arran's bird projects plus some wonderful photographs. Copies of the report are available from shops and other outlets across the island or by contacting ANHS c/o Lindsey and Robert Marr, Tiree, Brodick Road, Lamlash, Arran KA27 8JU. The report is priced at £5.00 (+£1.75 p&p) Email: arrannaturalhistorysociety@gmail.com For more information, visit: www.arranbirding.co.uk/arran-bird-report-2018.html

'Where to Watch Birds in Scotland' mobile app – now available for free download in app stores

J. ALLISON

The Club launched its new free app for nature lovers on 11 April. The guide, which is available for both Apple and Android devices, reveals nearly 400 of Scotland's best birdwatching locations (see *Scottish Birds* 39(1): 45 for a detailed summary of the app's features or visit www.the-soc.org.uk/app). New sites will continue to be added and every effort made by volunteers to update existing ones.

"This has been a major project for the Club. We hope the app will help a new generation of wildlife lovers to enjoy exciting birds in often spectacular and beautiful places across the length and breadth of Scotland. For anyone who didn't know where to start bird watching, this will show them the way. Even experienced birders will discover places and things they didn't know about. It's opening a completely new chapter in countryside access, with Scotland leading the way", Dr Ian Bainbridge, Club President.

Plate 123. The app's splash screen.

At the time of writing, four days after launch, the app has already been downloaded an incredible 2,500 times and has an average rating of 4.9/5 on the Apple Store and 5/5 on the Google Play store.

Three cheers for our volunteers...

The project is the result of three years of in-depth research and meticulous planning by a small working group comprising Jane Allison, Martin Cook and Alan Knox, assisted by a network of Local Co-ordinators and Contributors around the country.

The working group and SOC Council would like to thank all who dedicated their time to this project and helped to make the app a reality.

Local co-ordinators
Angus & Dundee Jon Cook
Argyll Jim Dickson
Ayrshire Fraser Simpson
Borders Malcolm Ross
Caithness Sinclair Manson
Clyde Marion Osler
Clyde Islands (unfilled)
Dumfries & Galloway Paul Collin
Fair Isle Ian Andrews & David Parnaby
Fife Graham Sparshott
Highland Peter Gordon
Isle of May Iain English & Stuart Rivers
Lothian Dave Allan & Ian Andrews
Moray & Nairn Martin Cook
North-East Scotland John Wills
Orkney Russell Neave
Outer Hebrides Yvonne Benting
Perth & Kinross Scott Paterson
Shetland Helen Moncrieff
Upper Forth Chris Pendlebury

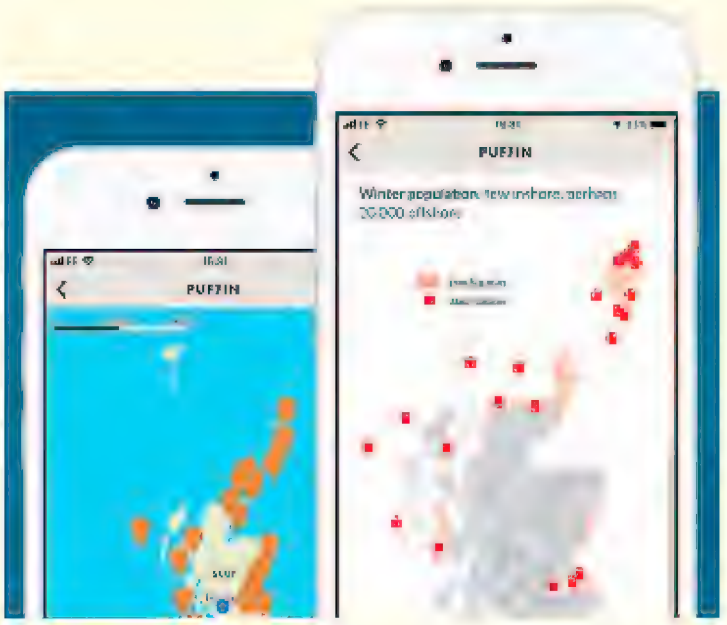

Plate 124 a–b. Sample screens from the App.

Site contributors (at launch): Hugh Addlesee, Dave Allan, Ian Andrews, Rob Armstrong, Paula Baker, Keith Ballantyne, Alex Banwell, Neil Beilby, Mike Bell, Andrew Bielinski, Joe Bilous, Rosie Black, Alisdair Blair, Kim Blasco, John Bowler, Tom Bowser, Richard Bramhall, Tom Brewis, Ian Broadbent, Allan Brown, Mike Chandler, John Chester, Jon Clarke, Richard Somers Cocks, Paul Collin, Jon Cook, Martin Cook, Anne Cotton, Jim Coyle, Will Cresswell, Colin Davison, Dougie Dickson, Jim Dickson, Hayley Douglas, Norman Elkins, Henry Farquhar, Ron Forrester, Ian Fulton, Graeme Garner, Rachel Gooday, Caroline Gordon, Peter Gordon, Dave Grant, Christopher Green, David Haines, Ian Halliday, Iain Hamlin, Kath Hamper, Mike Harrison, Robin Harvey, Bryan Hickman, Angus Hogg, John Holland, Mark Holling, Ian Hopkins, Mike Howes, Kevin Ingleby, David Jardine, Alan Kerr, Bruce Kerr, Alan Knox, Mark Lewis, Nick Littlewood, Dean MacAskill, Angus MacIver, Sinclair Manson, Marco McGinty, Alistair McGregor, Chris McInerny, Suzanne McIntyre, Michael McKee, Bob McMillan, Alastair McNee, David McNee, Alan and Judy McNeilly, John Marshall, Tim Marshall, Jimmy Maxwell, Doug Menzies, Will Miles, Brian Minshull, Neil Mitchell, Helen Moncrieff, Martin Moncrieff, Pete Moore, Sean Morris, Andrew Mossop, Jim Nicholson, Jonathan and Marilyn Nugent, Donald Omand, Scott Paterson, Chris Pendlebury, Allan Perkins, David Pickett, Anand Prasad, Catriona Reid, Simon Ritchie, Stuart Rivers, Andy Robinson, Malcolm Ross, Tommy Ross, Allan Russell, Calum Scott, Rab Shand, Ken Shaw, Alex Shepherd, Daryll Short, Fraser Simpson, Richard Smith, Moray Souter, Graham Sparshott, Brian Stewart, Ranald Strachan, Bob Swann, Dave Tanner, Richard Vernon, Malcolm Ware, Dan Watson, Richard Watt, Richard Wesley, Susan White, Andy Williams, John Wills, David Wood.

And our funders

The app's development was generously financed by the SOC's Birds of Scotland Fund - supporting ornithological publications and special projects in Scotland - as well as legacies to the Club from members and a donation from Glasgow Natural History Society.

SOC are grateful to the British Trust for Ornithology for help with links to BirdTrack, Keith Naylor for updated statistics on rare birds, and the editors of *The Birds of Scotland* (2007) for permission to use population data and distribution maps extracted from this landmark publication. Technical advice was provided by Robin Knox, Paul Walton and their colleagues at Intelligent Point of Sale in Edinburgh, subsequently Boundary Technologies.

A number of authors permitted the use of their material in the app or helped with other information. Thanks are due to:
Ian Andrews and Stephen Hunter - *Online Scottish Bird Report*
Julian Branscombe and RSPB Scotland - *Discover Orkney Wildlife* app
Jim Cassels - *Arran Birding* website
Raymond Duncan - Grampian Ringing Group
Ian Francis and Mark Sullivan - *Birding Guide to North-East Scotland, including part of the Cairngorm National Park*
Bob McMillan - *www.skye-birds.com*

To download the app, search for "**Where to Watch Birds Scotland**" in the app stores or follow the links from www.the-soc.org.uk/app

Jane Allison
Email: development@the-soc.org.uk

Mink and birds in Dumfriesshire

B. SMITH

In 1976, the late Dr Norah Armstrong and I were surveying a Black-headed Gull colony for photography. There were many nests with full clutches but not a single gull to be seen. At first, we thought it was the work of a Fox and as we looked around we saw a lot of footprints but they were too small for those of a Fox. It was finding a spraint which gave us the answer: feral Mink. Since then we have learned a lot about the effect of Mink on Black-headed Gulls and other wildlife. Ducklings, goslings and Moorhens vanish once Mink get in. At Applegarthtown Wildlife Sanctuary, Mink have got in four times after flood damage to the fencing. In 2006, a Rabbit dug a hole under the fence, Mink got in and the nesting season for the Black-headed Gulls and other birds was wrecked. With so many things being taken off the market like Cymag, and no ferreters locally, we have been unable to get rid of the Rabbits. Any gulls on eggs leave immediately while those with young remain until their young are taken. Our artificial Sand Martin colony was not affected as the concrete nest wall protects the birds. Mink, like rats, are normally most active at dusk and often go unnoticed. An example of this was at one of our nature reserves where nobody knew of them until a well-grown youngster came from under the main hide in broad daylight. When we see them in broad daylight, we know there are many about.

The biggest losses locally have been among our waders most noticeable among the Lapwing. Dr. Armstrong and I could drive the nine miles along the B7020 from Templand to near the outskirts of Beattock and see nearly 100 sitting birds without leaving the car. When he visited in the late 1960s, the late James Fisher was amazed as he had never seen Lapwing in small colonies before. We knew of at least six fields where there were small groups nesting together. The largest at Templand had well over 35 nests, others were Torthorwald, Thornhill, Glencaple, Cummertrees and Langholm where a hill colony of Black-headed Gulls also disappeared. The disappearance of Lapwing near Templand was so sudden that I asked the farmer if the field had been treated in some way, for example by spraying, but it had not. Snow on the ground revealed numerous Mink tracks. They started to run about our farm steading sometimes in groups of four or five and we had the eerie experience one night of one running calling above our ceiling. On another farm, one entered the house to be attacked by the collie. It took weeks to get rid of the smell; Mink are mustelids!

In 1976, I decided to check out the wildlife on the River Annan. My wife drove me to Johnstonebridge about five miles from our farm. My two daughters accompanied me along the river by canoe. Previously this stretch had plenty of birds: mainly Mallard, also Moorhen, Common Sandpiper, Oystercatcher, Red-breasted Merganser and many Sand Martins. This time, the river banks and gravel beds were deserted with only an occasional Sand Martin seen. We were almost home when we came across a Goosander with newly hatched young, whose survival was doubtful as we had seen a family of Mink a short distance away. Beattock Farm used to be a wonderful place for Curlew. I used to love hearing the calls of the whaups as we called the Curlews. In 1974, Ian Hamilton did a Curlew study and there were no Mink at that time. By 1977, there were no Curlew on the hill and they have never recovered. This has been the pattern on many hill farms.

We do not know how many Mink were released in our area. It must have been a large number for them to spread so quickly over so much of Dumfriesshire in the early and mid-1970s. In the early stages, they did not show the territorial instincts that came later as their numbers increased. The recent increase in Otters has helped to reduce Mink along rivers but in high rainfall areas like Dumfriesshire there are many ditches and burns for Mink to move along to hunt and breed. On a stretch of the River Annan, of less than a mile, the local gamekeeper kept a record of the Mink he trapped: 1975/76 = 125 trapped; 1977 =107; 1978 =14; 1979 = "an occasional animal". This suggests trapping was

having an effect but he was then unable to continue as his traps were being damaged and disappearing; some were found in the river.

One friend saw a Mink killing a Mallard which was swimming normally when it suddenly disappeared below the surface. When it surfaced a Mink was attached to its neck. The hide at Applegarth had a false ceiling with provision for bats at one end and at owls at the other. The wings of three Teal were found in the space. To reach the hole, the Teal had to be carried up the outside of the hide. It therefore looks as though duck nest boxes in trees are not safe from Mink. Another bird that has suffered is the Red-breasted Merganser. This bird nested regularly on one of our farms in the wrack left on the riverside fields by the winter floods, but not anymore. Even domestic hens in henhouses have been raided and one lady lost not only her hens but all her kittens as well.

I thank the following people for their help and information. The late Dr Norah Armstrong, the late Sir Arthur Duncan, the late Tom Irving (Langholm), the late Jim Young (Thornhill) for all the help on what was happening in their areas and retired local gamekeeper Neil Gardner. A big thank you to Pat Whalley for typing this article for me.

Bobby Smith

High-altitude Avocet, Lecht Ski Centre, North-east Scotland

E. WESTON

This was definitely the weirdest and most out-of-place bird I have ever seen - well maybe apart from the Eastern Rosella that used to feed with the Waxwings in one of my friends' gardens.

I was travelling back from a meeting in Inverness on 21 November 2018 and despite the horrible weather I decided to drive back to Aberdeenshire over the Lecht road. At about 15:00 hrs, about 1 km past the Lecht Ski Centre (at an altitude of c.600 m), I slowed down for a black-and-white bird in middle of the road. My initial impression was of a summer plumage Black-headed Gull, which immediately struck me as unlikely for the time of year. Moments later, when the bird took flight, the penny dropped with the black stripes down the back, black patches on the wings and black wing tips - a flipping Avocet!

The bird flew very slowly down the road and landed just beyond a convenient layby. Despite not having my binoculars with me (the weather really was that awful), I was treated to a few minutes of a very lost Avocet, standing in the middle of the rain-soaked road just 40–50 feet away.

I know this site extremely well, having studied waders in this exact area for many years with Rab (Skitts) Rae. So, while watching the bird I had enough time to phone him and play the guessing game of what new wader species had turned up on our breeding wader study area. Although Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit and Whimbrel all featured in the guess list, I don't think Skitts, even in his wildest dreams, would have imagined an Avocet there.

After a few minutes the bird took off, flying low, heading down into Donside. It looked totally lost and I think the combination of rain, sleet and wind had grounded the bird on this mountain pass. The wet road may even have resembled a stream? It was certainly the most unexpected bird sighting I have ever had and I'm sure I'll remember it every time I travel that road in future.

Ewan Weston, Torphins, Aberdeenshire.
Email: ewan_weston@hotmail.com

Plate 125. The Leithies, North Berwick, Lothian, April 2019. The Eider nesting area is the rock on the right. © *Stan da Prato*

Eider monitoring at North Berwick

S. RANSCOMBE

The Eider Monitoring Project started in 2007 in response to a Scottish Natural Heritage SSSI site condition monitoring report on the Firth of Forth in August 2006. The report notified breeding Eider as a feature of the SSSI between Longniddry and Dunbar (Lothian). Murray (2006) was contracted in April–May 2006 to undertake counts of male, immature male and female Eider along this section of East Lothian coastline. The Leithies, a group of islands some accessible by foot at low tide, near North Berwick, was noted as an important breeding site for Eider, recording 50 or more attempted nests and this area of the coastline was noted as being nationally important for breeding Eider. Murray found few breeding Eider elsewhere along the coast which he attributed to disturbance. Calladine *et al.* (1996) had noted c. 1,100 pairs of Eider on the Isle of May with c. 250 pairs on the other Forth islands and commented that Eiders were increasingly using offshore islands for nesting in preference to the coast.

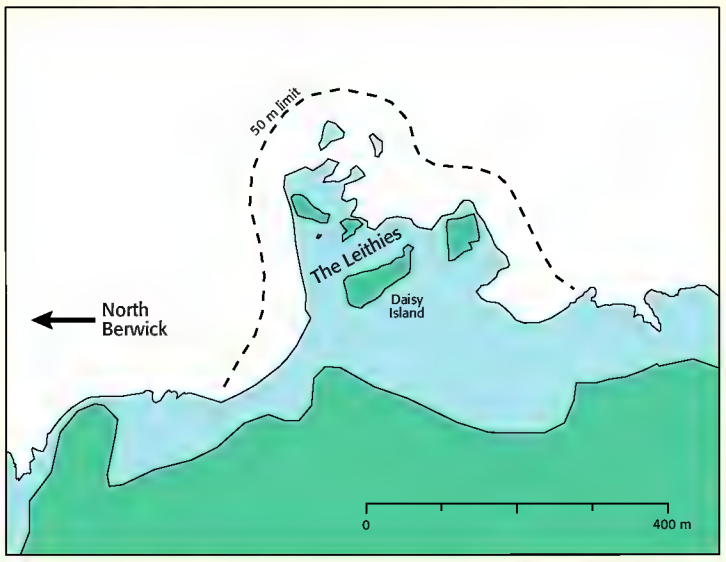

Figure 1. The Leithies, east of North Berwick, Lothian.

The East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service responded to the SNH report by setting up the Eider Monitoring Project to gather data on Eider numbers and breeding success at the Leithies between April and July. The project also records numbers of people and types of recreation that might cause disturbance and affect breeding success. Predators such as gulls and crows are also recorded.

The Leithies are made up of a series of rocky outcrops accessible by foot at low tide. The main nesting area is located on the sheltered eastern island which is less visited by the public than the middle Daisy Island (named after the Sea Daisy, the local name for Thrift). Three

ground nesting bird advisory signs are in place between April and July encouraging the public to avoid disturbing nesting birds at the Leithies. The countryside ranger and a team of volunteers regularly visit a monitoring position overlooking the Leithies to record the following data:

- numbers of Eider males, females, ducklings, crèche sizes on or within 50 m of the islands
- numbers of people observed on the outward and return journeys (each c. 1 km)
- number of people seen during the 30-minute monitoring period
- specific incidents of visitor or dog disturbance on the islands
- numbers of gulls and Carrion Crows on the islands and any predation attempts
- wind direction, cloud cover, rainfall and state of the tide

The ranger provides a training session and information pack for the volunteers; in 2018, 14 volunteers made a total of 70 visits between early April and July, stopping when no ducklings were seen.

Male and female Eider numbers 2011–2018

Table 1 shows count data since 2011. Counts followed the standard methodology for estimating numbers of breeding Eiders (Gilbert *et al.* 1998) which had been used by Murray. Since 2011, the peak male numbers were usually recorded in the second week of May and females in mid-June. In 2017 and 2018, peak male and female numbers were recorded earlier.

Table 1. Peak male and female count data 2011–2018.

Year	Peak number of males seen at one time (date)	Peak number of females seen at one time (date)
2011	69 (12 May)	34 (28 June)
2012	100 (11 May)	70 (11 May)
2013	65 (6 May)	44 (10 June)
2014	65 (13 May)	33 (10 June)
2015	70 (11 May)	21 (16 & 26 June)
2016	101 (3 May)	47 (15 June)
2017	88 (29 April)	41 (27 April)
2018	105 (26 April)	53 (26 April)

The number of ducklings seen is shown in Table 2. Numbers have been generally lower in recent years though we cannot be sure how many move further along the coast soon after hatching. Counts of small crèches along the shore between the Leithies and North Berwick harbour, where no Eiders breed, suggest this may happen, though overall numbers are still low. It is also likely that some of these ducklings have come from the island of Craiglieth which is only 2 km away; 213+ Eider nests were found there in 2010 and the young are assumed to move away to avoid the 1,500 pairs of gulls.

Table 2. Duckling and crèche numbers, the Leithies, Lothian, 2007–18.

Year	First duckling seen	Last duckling seen	Largest number of ducklings seen on one visit	Largest crèche size of ducklings seen on one visit
2007	28 May	25 Jun	47	40
2008	21 May	17 Jul	43	14
2009	21 May	11 Jul	20	11
2010	19 May	5 Jul	21	9
2011	25 May	13 Jul	28	13
2012	13 Jul	13 Jul	1	1
2013	3 Jun	8 Jul	26	9
2014	3 Jun	27 Jul	22	22
2015	29 May	6 Jul	9	9
2016	10 May	10 Jun	5	5
2017	22 May	26 Jun	3	3
2018	27 May	5 Jun	12	12

The ranger checks the islands for nests in July at the end the breeding season and counts are shown in Table 3. The maximum recorded was 49 in 2016. Nest numbers suggest a relatively stable breeding population.

Table 3. Number of Eider nests counted on the Leithies at the end of the breeding season, 2007–18.

Year	Eider nesting attempts	Year	Eider nesting attempts
2007	33	2013	39
2008	23	2014	3
2009	27	2015	44
2010	14	2016	49
2011	30	2017	43
2012	12	2018	44

People, dogs and recreation

The total numbers of sightings of people and dogs along the adjacent coast and at the monitoring site are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. People and dog numbers, the Leithies, Lothian, 2012–18.

Year	Number of half-hour visits	Total people seen on adjacent coast	Total people on islands	Total dogs seen	Total dogs on islands
2012	92	654	31	No count	2
2013	77	1,008	32	No count	2
2014	97	1,044	19	67	3
2015	66	550	25	77	6
2016	70	601	14	40	1
2017	86	766	24	170	5
2018	70	470	19	98	2

Types of recreation recorded during monitoring were varied including walking, dog walking, mountain biking, fishing, kayaking, coasteering, drone flying, overnight camping and picnicking. Most of the human activity recorded was on the adjacent shore, not the Leithies. More direct and potentially damaging disturbance could be from dogs (many off lead) which are sometime recorded on the island for example by the 24 people and five dogs recorded going on the Leithies in 2017. Volunteers witnessed two incidents of people and dogs causing Eiders and Oystercatchers to fly off the islands in alarm on 30 April and 6 May in that year.

Gulls and Carrion Crows

Table 5 shows numbers of gulls (mainly Herring and Lesser Black-backed) and Carrion Crows recorded per hour of observation on the Leithies. Actual predation attempts were not observed though given the low numbers of ducklings recorded probably occurred when no observers were present. Murray (2006) observed disturbance resulting in both gulls and Carrion Crow taking ducklings in 2006. One possible incident of predation was recorded on 19 June 2017 on the western island where four pairs of Common Terns were nesting and recorded mobbing gulls. Successful predation attempts have been recorded away from the Leithies nesting area however. Elswhere in East Lothian at Musselburgh, which is frequently visted by birdwatchers, many Eider chicks have been seen taken by gulls - nearly always Lesser Black-backed. (I.J. Andrews pers. comm.)

Table 5. Gull and Carrion Crow numbers, the Leithies, Lothian, 2013–18.

Year	Gulls per hour's observation	Carrion Crows per hour's observation
2013	8.5	1
2014	8.9	0.9
2015	5.5	0.8
2016	6.7	1.7
2017	7.3	1.8
2018	7.6	1.9

Poor weather can reduce people numbers and recreational incidents but is also likely to affect Eider breeding success. In 2012, when weather conditions were very poor, only one Eider chick was recorded between April and July in 92 recording visits.

The data gathered over the last 11 years indicate a reasonably stable population of breeding Eiders. Productivity however seems to be low although some ducklings may have been taken out of the area to fledge elsewhere along the coast. Relatively high numbers of people and dogs on the coast do not seem to impact on breeding Eider on the Leithies as few venture onto the main breeding island but a small number of dogs off lead and not under close control could reduce breeding success.

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Plate 126. Snowy Owl, Hallilee, South Mainland, Shetland, 5 June 2018. © *Ian Cowgill*

Snowy Owl encounter

I. COWGILL

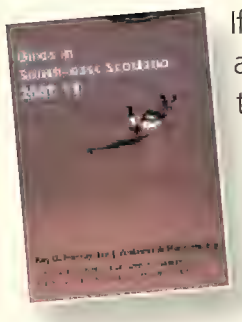
Shetland in early June can be a magical place but with little of note around on 5 June 2018, news of a nearby Snowy Owl sighting would be well worth looking for. The Snowy Owl had been found earlier in the day by Sarah Harris on the high moorland between the villages of Bigton on the west coast and Levenwick on the east coast. When I arrived on site, I could see a few birders searching the western slopes so I decided there was no point doing the same and headed north. After 20 minutes walking over the rough terrain created by old peat cuttings, I walked straight in to the owl which was sheltering in a peat hag (Plate 126). I know it's not like finding the bird but it was exciting to see such a beautiful bird so close. In between taking photos, I tried to phone a friend with the news but with a patchy signal and a featureless landscape this proved very difficult. When the owl eventually took flight a Great Skua began to harass it (Plate 127), but the owl dealt with the situation quite calmly before settling in another hag in the distance and allowing good views for everyone.

Ian Cowgill, Carlton-in-Lindrick, Worksop, Nottinghamshire.

Plate 127. Snowy Owl and Great Skua, Hallilee, South Mainland, Shetland, 5 June 2018. © *Ian Cowgill*

BOOK REVIEWS

Birds in South-east Scotland 2007–13: a tetrad atlas of the birds of Lothian and Borders. Ray D. Murray, Ian J. Andrews & Mark Holling, 2019. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady, ISBN 978-0-9512139-7-1, hardback, 542 pages, £40.00.



If the production of a bird atlas was a competition, then this book would be high on the list of those aiming for the first prize - and at 2.7 kg in weight it has a lot to live up to! Content, not looks, is what matters and from the outset one can sense that this is a book of both quality and substance. It is dedicated to the memory of one of the lead authors, Ray Murray, who sadly passed away during its preparation but who was a main inspiration to the project undertaking a huge amount of fieldwork and writing many of the species accounts. The other two key authors and several assistants have all had a long association with the area and the SOC, and their hard work and commitment to producing a work synthesising the efforts of many observers cannot be underestimated. The book has had a long gestation period, but it has involved a huge effort and has been well worth the wait.

Opening chapters place the project and area into context, whilst a chapter on habitats and their use by birds includes excellent photographs of the various habitats found in the area together with maps which provide a wonderful correlation between some species distributions and the habitats they frequent. Subsequent chapters describe aspects such as the weather, fieldwork methodology, population estimates and map interpretation, along with a valuable assessment of change, both in range and breeding numbers, in the avifauna of SE Scotland since the previous atlas of 1988–94. This is a key element of the outcome of atlas work and sets the baseline for comparative work in the future.

The species accounts are the core to the book. Two hundred species are covered by text and maps, with two pages for each species, most with an accompanying photograph. The texts provide concise summaries of summer and winter distributions identifying key locations where appropriate and providing an estimate of overall numbers, which are also summarised in a comprehensive Appendix. However, maps are the key element of an atlas and for all species these are presented in a bright, clear and easily understood manner with invaluable change maps for breeding distribution between 1988–94 and 2008–13. In short, they are superb. The inclusion of histograms relating tetrad use to mean altitude is also an innovative concept adding to the data interpretation of how species distribution changes between summer and winter and between breeding atlases.

This monumental work is an outstanding book and a fitting legacy to the commitment of Ray Murray. It will be of great value to anyone interested in the birds of the Lothians and the Borders, the identified trends in species distributions, and as a foretaste of what the future might hold. Hopefully it will encourage some observers to become involved in monitoring individual species or groups of species on a more regular basis and reduce the need for estimates in the next atlas!

Allan W. Brown

The Seabird's Cry. Adam Nicolson, 2018. William Collins, London, ISBN 978-0-00-816570-3, paperback, 400 pages, £9.99.

People were recommending this to me before I had seen it and it has to be one of the best and most riveting bird books I have ever read. The author Adam Nicolson whose family has owned the Shiant Isles since 1937, is a prize-winning writer of many books on history, nature and the countryside, and this one won The Wainwright Golden Beer Book Prize 2018. In addition, to delightful illustrations by artist Kate Boxer which head each of ten chapters on different seabird species (auks, gulls, gannets, tubenoses, cormorants), it is well illustrated throughout with old and new photographs, diagrams and maps.

Nicolson's love of seabirds clearly stems from his childhood visits to the Shiants and his encyclopedic knowledge of past and present research and seabird lore is very evident here. He has had personal contact with, and help from, many seabird scientists, including Scottish ones, and he never fails to put across sometimes complex information in an easily readable and often poetic form. The many threats which have caused global seabird numbers to drop by two thirds since 1950 make depressing reading, but recent research described here shows how one threat in particular, plastic pollution, acts on the tubenoses (Procellariiformes) in an unexpected way. Their exceptional sense of smell allows them to locate their krill food over great distances of ocean from

plumes of dimethyl sulphide (DMS) which are emitted by phytoplankton when disturbed (and eaten) by the krill. The problem is, however, that small fragments of plastic floating in the ocean also produce plumes of DMS, which explains why fulmars, petrels and albatrosses now mistake pieces of plastic for food and die as a result.

This is a hugely important and inspirational book and I cannot recommend it highly enough.

John Savory

Gulls of the World - a photographic guide. Klaus Malling Olsen 2018. Helm, ISBN 9781408181645, hardback, 368 pages, 600+ colour photos, £35.00.

With 61 species in the world, gulls present a bewildering variety of plumages, age groups, and subspecies, many of which are very difficult to separate, even to species. However, for many larophiles (gull fanatics!) it is this complex taxonomy and identification that makes this family of birds particularly fascinating. This book is a companion and successor to Klaus Malling Olsen's previous work - *Gulls of Europe, Asia and North America* (Christopher Helm 2004) and offers the definitive photographic guide to gulls, by the world's greatest authority on gull identification.

The guide covers all of the world's gull species, tackling some of the most notoriously difficult identification and taxonomic challenges in birding. Each species account uses concise text, focusing on field identification, including detailed discussion on sub-species variation, with coverage of habitat, status and distribution. The species accounts are accompanied by accurate colour range maps, which I found particularly informative. Each photograph has been carefully selected to highlight identification criteria and, crucially, to allow age and sub-specific separation in the field. For those ornithologists who are particularly interested in gull identification and taxonomy, this book provides an invaluable tool, featuring the most sought-after rarities as well as beautiful, and easy-to-identify species.

Mike Thornton

Curlew Moon. Mary Colwell, 2018. William Collins, ISBN 978-0-00-824105-6, hardback, 328 pages, £16.99.

There are many natural history books out there which tell a story and this one by Mary Colwell is one of the most engaging ones I've read in a long while. It consists of a journey made by the author to discover the fate of the Curlew across their breeding season, starting in Ireland and ending 500 miles later in England. In recent years we have become aware that something is happening to Curlews and in this book, Mary meets many different people who are trying to rectify what has gone wrong. She also meets people who are willing to help her on her journey and share their experiences of Curlews. There is something charming yet worrying in the way many view our countryside as a haven for wildlife without realising that it is a finely tuned environment and little changes can have a big impact. These changes are discussed by the author as she travels across the different counties. If you enjoy travel books and natural history books this one combines the two genres perfectly and leaves you with a sense of wanting to find out how you can help the Curlew survive its current plight.

Hayley Anne Douglas

Also received...

The Feather Thief. The natural history heist of the century. Kirk Wallace Johnson, 2019. Windmill Books, ISBN 978-0-099-51066-6, 297 pages, paperback, £9.99.

The strange, depressing, true story of the burglar who broke into the Natural History Museum at Tring and stole hundreds of irreplaceable, historic bird specimens - to break them up and sell their feathers for fishing flies. It's not the only place such selfish thefts have taken place, at the expense of science and our cultural history.

Birds of Bhutan and the Eastern Himalayas. Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp, Tim Inskipp & Sherub, 2019. Helm Field Guides, ISBN 978-1-4729-4188-6, 416 pages, paperback, £30.00.

Birds of Spain. James Lowen & Carlos Bocos, 2019. Helm Pocket Photo Guides, ISBN 978-1-4729-4927-1, 144 pages, paperback, £9.99.

The book reviews published in *Scottish Birds* reflect the views of the named reviewers and not those of the SOC.

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

Observatories' Roundup is a regular bi-annual feature about our bird observatories in Scotland. The intention is to publicise the work of the observatories, visiting opportunities, as well as incidental snippets of news from the islands.

Plate 128. Site of the burnt out observatory. © *Karen Hall*

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

Sunday 10 March 2019 will go down in Fair Isle Bird Observatory's long and rich history for all the wrong reasons.

Smoke seen emanating from the Observatory by crew members of the *Good Shepherd* ferry as they began their crossing to Shetland mainland turned out to be from a much worse position than was first thought.

The fire, which had started for yet unknown reasons, quickly took hold and unfortunately completely razed the building to the ground. From the accompanying photographs (Plates 128–129), it can be seen that all that is left is a relatively small pile of debris.

Plate 129. All that remains of the burnt out observatory, 21 March 2019. © *Karen Hall*

Fortunately and most importantly, neither David and Susannah Parnaby, our Warden and Administrator, nor their children Grace and Freyja were injured.

Everything that was in the Observatory has been lost. Decades of archival paper bird records, our excellent library and all historical documentation pertaining to the Observatory have been reduced to ash.

David, Susannah and their children have now been rehoused on the island. We are continuing to operate the Observatory with severely reduced staff numbers but obviously no guests. This will ensure from an ornithological standpoint that our unbroken bird recording for the last seven decades will continue.

It is our intention to fully rebuild the Observatory with a provisional reopening date being proposed for spring 2021. We appreciate the considerable task that faces us in doing so, however the importance of the Observatory to ornithology and to the Isle are all the incentives we need.

Can I take this opportunity of thanking all the emergency services and in particular the Fair Isle fire crew for all their valiant efforts in trying to save the Observatory. To the birding community we are indebted for all your support and assistance in what has been the most difficult period of our existence.

Until 2021, when we look forward to welcoming you back to our new Observatory.

Douglas Barr, Chairman of FIBOT

Plate 130. A phoenix-like Robin perched amongst the observatory ashes. © *David Parnaby*

Bird highlights

The start of 2019 has obviously been dominated by the loss of the Obs building and contents to fire but FIBO continues. Thanks to returning staff Richard Cope and Chris Dodd, as well as volunteers Nina O'Hanlon, Max Hellicar and Tom Gale, we have been able to carry on with census as normal, with ringing activities also taking place (thanks to donations from Spurn BO, Porzana and the BTO who swiftly arranged replacement ringing kit). The seabird season has just begun, with most species back on their ledges and territories and we will aim to carry out a full programme of productivity and population monitoring during the summer.

Bird-wise, things were rather quiet in the early part of the year, although a Red-necked Grebe was a rare sighting for the Isle. Things improved considerably in April, when a series of easterly-based winds delivered a number of interesting migrants including Black Kite (third Fair Isle record), Little Ringed Plover (7th record), 'White-spotted Bluethroat' (10th record), 'Northern Treecreeper' (11th record), 'Black-bellied Dipper' (40th record), Great Grey Shrike, two Shorelarks, five Hawfinches and an unseasonal Curlew Sandpiper (just the fifth in spring). Common migrants were recorded in reasonable numbers for some species, although at the time of writing (late April) we are still awaiting the majority of the classic spring migrants to move through. The forecast is for more easterlies towards the end of the month, a time that has delivered many rarities in the past, so we'll be hoping for some exciting birding to come.

Finally, we would like to thank all the members of the Scottish birding community (including many from North-east Scotland, where we lived prior to coming to Fair Isle) who have been in touch to offer their best wishes, help and donations. Your support is hugely appreciated and has been a massive help. We look forward to seeing many of you on Fair Isle in 2021 when the Obs is rebuilt.

David and Susannah Parnaby, Warden and Administrator, Fair Isle Bird Observatory

Isle of May Bird Observatory

Ian Darling stepped down as Observatory Chairman at the IoMBO Trust AGM in March 2019, after 19 years in post, and 11 years before that as IoMBOT Honorary Secretary. Alan Lauder was elected as the new Chairman, and was wished well for his time in the role.

During Ian's time as Chairman, the observatory has undergone major changes, most notably the redevelopment and extension of the Low Light building. This has allowed a greater level of occupancy to be achieved and the instigation of the Young Birders' Training Course as well. With several other improvements also underway (trap renovation etc.) the Observatory looks well set for the future.

To thank Ian for all his time and effort over the years, and contribution to the current healthy state of the observatory and its activities a dinner was held on 9 March at The Rockies Restaurant at Anstruther, which allows views across to the Isle of May. After speeches from Julian Osborne (IoMBOT Hon Secretary) and David Steel (SNH island warden) and Ian himself, he was presented with a commissioned original artwork by Darren Woodhead. It features the Red-footed Falcon which graced the island in 2015 during a week when Ian was staying at the Low Light. On seeing the bird, he was famously seen to be extremely pleased, celebrating with others on the island and with 'fist-pumping' in evidence, and his reaction to the painting was no less appreciative!

Plate 131. Ian and Kate Darling. © *Stuart Rivers*

The Bain Trap

Heligoland traps are vital to the operational success of the IoMBO with a decade average (2009–18) of new birds ringed of 4,075 and about 1,000 additional controls and recaptures per year. The Isle of May has four main functional traps: Top, Arnott, Bain and Low Traps. The Bain Trap was the third of these traps to be built on the island and was originally constructed by John Bain in 1948–49 in the Thistle Field (also known as the Mouse House Field). However, in recent years a working plan to replace all four traps has been undertaken starting with the replacement of the Top Trap in spring 2017.

Plate 132. The new Bain Trap being constructed. © *Iain English*

Plate 133. Common Cranes flying north over the Isle of May, 25 March 2019. © *Viv Hastie*

This year the work party arrived on the island on 23 March with the main focus of work to replace the ageing Bain Trap on the island. Work began soon after arrival, as the old trap was dismantled and the new construction (with timber funded by SNH) started in the same footprint as the previous trap. At the time of writing work has progressed well and the new trap should be fully operational by 20 April.

Bird highlights

2018 finished with a total of 169 species on the year list, our third highest total (180 in 2016, 177 in 2017) and including a new species for the island - Buff-breasted Sandpiper, the first Nearctic wader recorded on the May. It continues a 'purple-patch' for the island, with hopes high that 2019 will also prove a great year for birds on the May.

The winter months are generally a quiet time for the Observatory as after the closure the previous November, there are no full-time island residents until the return of the island staff and Observatory work party in late March. However during this time visits are made occasionally by the island reserve manager or researchers and the odd interesting bird record is noted.

During this spell at the start of 2019, a Kumlien's Gull was discovered in the evening roost on Rona off the north end of the island on 20 February representing the first record of this sub-species to the island. Otherwise, it proved a quiet time with a Red-necked Grebe on 10 January, Black Guillemot on 20 February and up to six wintering Short-eared Owls. Following the return of the island residents, the final week of March provided a few noteworthy highlights including two adult Cranes which were seen and heard flying north towards Fife at 11:25 on the morning of 25 March, only the second ever island record following an individual in May 2004. Birds now breed in northern Scotland and 'our birds' may have been part of this small population returning to northern breeding grounds. Other highlights included the first Osprey of the year (an individual north on 29 March), whilst good birds from an island context included drake Tufted Duck on 24–26th, male Crossbill on 29th, Tree Sparrow on 29–30th, two Goosander on 30th, two Manx Shearwater north on 31th and 10 Whooper Swans north the same day.

As a result of the mild spring, seabirds were quick to respond with large numbers of Puffins making landfall on 25 March whilst Shags were well established at nest sites with the first egg discovered on 1 April.

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Distribution trends of the Scops Owl in Britain and northern Europe

J.R. MARTIN & H. MIKKOLA

The Scops Owl is one of the less well-known species that migrates into central and northern Europe from Africa each spring. Recently noted expansion of the distribution and breeding in Germany (Mebs & Nicklaus 2014), encouraged us to summarise the occurrence in Britain from the early 1800s to the present day, and to discuss changes and provide comparative information from northern Europe.

Plate 134. Scops Owl, Portugal. © *Artur Vaz Oliveira*

The Scops Owl in Britain

1800–1949

Table 1 shows all accepted British records. The first accepted record came from Wetherby, West Yorkshire in 1905 and up until 1950, there were a further 43 (Naylor 1996).

1950–69

There were nine confirmed records in Britain from 1950 to 1969, two of which are from the autumn period. Three of those records came from the Northern Isles - Orkney (1) and Shetland (2). Two records in 1968 were remarkable as there had been only one other in the UK (Orkney, June 1965) since 1958 (Smith *et al.* 1969).

1970–89

There were 14 accepted records during this period, four of which are from the Scottish islands of Orkney (2), Shetland (1) and Barra (1), with two autumn records: Holm, Orkney on 27 November 1970 and Kent on 22 October 1971. Up until this period there had only been two autumn records. Of the eight birds that were reported in the period 1980 to 1990, four were from Scotland, which was nearly as many as there had been in the previous 30 years (Figure 1).

Table 1. Scops Owl records for Britain, 1805–2017. Sources: Naylor (1996), Forrester *et al.* (2007), *British Birds* Rarities Committee Reports, and latest records from *tarsiger.com* 2018.

Periods	Number of years	Number of accepted records	Number of autumn records	Number of Scottish records
19th century	95	23	4	4
1900–49	49	17	2	9
1950–69	20	9	2	3
1970–89	20	14	2	5
1990–2009	20	15	1	9
2010–17	8	4	1	3

Figure 1. Annual occurrence of Scops Owl in Britain, 1950–2017.

1990–2018

From 1990 onwards sightings increased, and for the first time three Scops Owls were recorded in one year (2006), two of which were in Scotland: Swining, Shetland on 10 May 2006 and Fair Isle on 17 May 2006. There was an additional record in June 2006 from Thrupp, in Oxfordshire, which was followed by another there the following year. The first bird nearly went unnoticed because residents initially considered the call to be a canal boat alarm. The bird had probably been present since 21 April (Fraser *et al.* 2007). Quite possibly the same bird returned the following year and was present from 15 May to at least 5 June.

Further records from this period include one on the Isles of Scilly on 25 March 2012, a late arrival on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, on 15 June 2014, and another which was seen at Windhouse Lodge, Yell, Shetland on 24 June, which may have been the earlier one from North Ronaldsay (Warren 2014). There was also one autumn record from Ryhope, Co. Durham, during 27 September to 6 October 2017, and one summer record from Portsoy, North-east Scotland from late May to early June 2018 (*Scottish Birds* 38: 286) [still to be considered by BBRC].

Timing

In 1990, the earliest March (20th) record for Britain occurred when a bird was caught on a fishing boat a little way off Portland Bill, Dorset. This was followed by other March records from Porthgwarra, Cornwall (24 March 2002) and more recently, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly (25

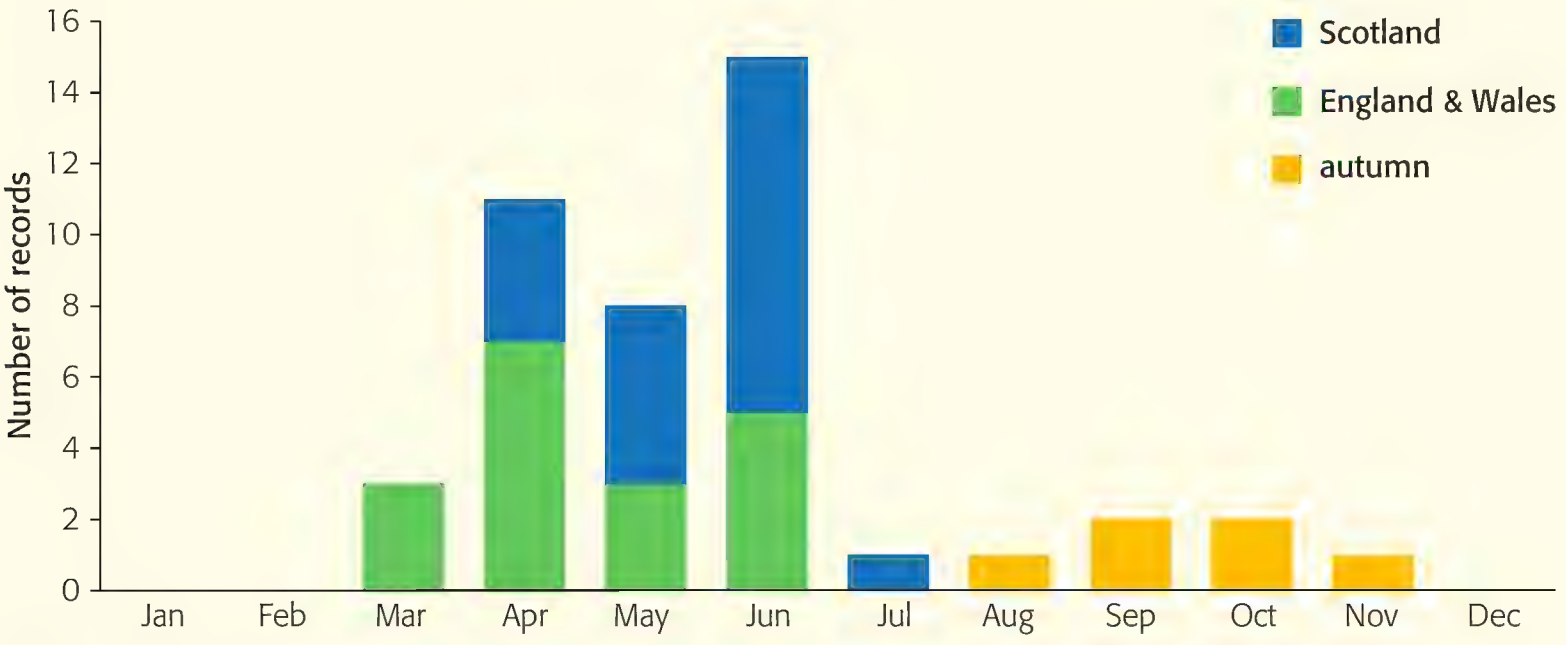

Figure 2. Records of Scops Owl in Britain, 1950–2017.

March 2012). All these locations are on the south-west coast of England.

Records from Scotland are later with just one record from April, five in May, 11 in June and one in July.

The wider European picture

Mebs & Nicklaus (2014) noted that in Germany between 1901 and 2009 there were nine well-documented or credible breeding records and at least two further suspected breeding cases. Most interesting is that the majority of the records were from the period 2002 to 2009. In 10 cases, territories were occupied over a period of several years by pairs or single birds. On seven occasions, several males were recorded in a single territory. The reasons for this recent expansion are unclear but the climate change and very warm summers are more than likely affecting this development.

Plate 135. Scops Owl, Portugal. © *Artur Vaz Oliveira*

Similarly, Scops Owls have now been recorded in far flung places such as Iceland, Ireland, the Faeroe Islands, Belgium, Netherlands, and Poland, along with Fennoscandia i.e. Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, where it is an increasingly frequent visitor. Recent information suggests that the Scops Owl is expanding its range northwards from its core distribution in central and western Europe (tarsiger.com 2018). This is supported by records from Poland where a bird was found calling on 14 May 2013 at Mazowsze, while a pair was later seen on 13–19 June (Birding in Poland). Breeding has also been suspected in Holland, when a 'singing' bird was observed in Gelderland from 17 May to 11 June 1998 (van Dijk *et al.* 2001). In Denmark, the first record for East Jutland occurred on 27–28 May 2012 (Laursen 2013). In 2012, a pair bred in Germany, at a location that was further north than in Holland, and only 100 km south-west from Denmark (Birdcall in Denmark). In 2017, the first European ringing recovery was made in Falster, Denmark when remains of a dead Scops Owl were found by a dog on 11 November. It had been ringed as an adult in Santpedor, north-west of Barcelona, Spain on 1 April 2017. It has been speculated that the owl reached Denmark (1,621 km north) due to very warm nights and strong SSW winds in the second half of October (Madsen 2017).

Even more remarkable is the northerly progress that this species has made in Finland, Sweden and Norway. In Finland, the first record of Scops Owl comes from a bird that was heard singing in Hauho, in the southern part of the country, from 3 June to 7 July 2011, although no nest was found (Södersved 2011). In 2018, a Scops Owl was photographed only 20 km from the place where one was heard in 2011 (Leila Uotila, 22 May 2018). In addition, two more Scops Owls were heard in 2018. One was recorded 200 km west from Hauho (Södersved 2018). Another bird was calling in late summer and early autumn at Virolahti, which is near the Russian border, on the south coast, so we do not believe that these three birds are linked.

In Sweden, there have been four examples of birds which have either been seen, or heard, during the breeding season. Gotland is a likely area for this bird to breed in the future, due to the number of records from that area. On 31 May 2011, a bird was ringed on Gotland Island, which was the third record for this site (Larsson 2012). A further example of how this species is moving northwards comes from Norway when on 29 October 2013, one was captured at Tromsø, in the extreme north and 1,500 km north of all previous records. Prior to that it had only been known from Norway on two previous occasions. The first was an individual that landed on a fishing boat at Rogaland in 1954, while another was recorded at Larvik, in 2002 (Norsk Ornithologisk Forening).

Assessing the status of Scops Owl

Over the past 150 years, there has been a steady increase in European air temperatures, but this appears to have accelerated sharply in the past 20 or so years. Addressing the subject of climate change and the effects it may have on Europe's birds, Huntley *et al.* (2007) used UK Climate Projections (UKCP09) and current species' distributions to anticipate their future distributions in the 21st century. They proposed that Scops Owl will extend its breeding range across Europe, including the colonization of southern Fennoscandia and south-east England. Ausden *et al.* (2015) also thought this was likely. The increase in Scottish records fits with a northward extension of the species' breeding range although so far there is no evidence of Scops Owls holding territory in Scotland in recent years [although, it possibly did happen in 2018].

The possibility of the Scops Owl expanding its breeding range into Scotland and Scandinavia is certainly worth bearing in mind over forthcoming years.

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to Anders Wirdheim for providing us with the details of Swedish Scops Owl records, while Keith Naylor not only provided the information on historical records, he scrutinized an early draft. In Finland, Juha Honkala has kindly allowed us to use his recording of a Scops Owl call, and we thank him for that.

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Locating Scops Owls

This is a very small owl measuring 19–20 cm in length and with a wing span of 53–63 cm (Cramp 1985). Reversed sexual dimorphism means that even though a female is around 30% larger than a male, a typical female sits quite comfortably in the hand of a man. Due to its small size, cryptic colouration and habits of perching near tree trunks, Scops Owls can be almost impossible to find in a forest. Hundreds of birdwatchers looked for this owl in Finland after it had been heard but only one photo exists so far (Södersved 2018). In Hungary, some 500 calls were registered between 2010 and 2012 but the bird was not seen (Mikkola & Mikkola 2015). Another frustrated trip report puts it well: "I heard five Scops Owls in Cyprus, but have still not seen one though I was right below one calling and responding to me" (Bickerton 1995). Voice is the best clue that a bird is present. A calling male provides a soft monosyllabic penetrative song which in quiet locations can be heard some way off. It is a call that many birdwatchers are unfamiliar with and which in the past has been mistaken for alarm systems. We include here Juha Honkala's recording from Finland: www.xeno-canto.org/82047. We feel that some Scops are missed on autumn passage as they are silent then. Scops Owls tend to favour lightly wooded farmland, orchards, open wooded landscapes and parks but not dense forest or woodland.

Plate 136. Rose-coloured Starling, Vatersay, Outer Hebrides, 14 June 2018. © *Bruce Taylor*

The Rose-coloured Starling influx in 2018 and a brief review of its recent status in Scotland

S.L. RIVERS

Rose-coloured Starlings breed colonially in steppe grasslands and farmed land in Eastern Europe from southern Ukraine and eastern Turkey eastwards, south of 50°N, to Kazakhstan and NW China and south to Syria and Afghanistan, often with small outlying, isolated breeding colonies in Romania, Bulgaria and NE Greece. After breeding, it typically has a period of dispersal, roaming widely in search of food. It is wholly migratory, wintering in India, with small numbers also in coastal Oman. The species is known for its periodic, irruptive movements further west into Europe, generally thought to be triggered by a lack of its usual insect food, particularly grasshoppers and locusts, within its normal breeding range.

2018 movements in Europe

The irruptive movement of 2018 was first evident when several hundreds of birds were noted in Hungary in April, soon followed by hundreds reported in Italy and southern France, and many in Austria and Switzerland. By mid to late May, birds had reached Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Poland and Britain.

First arrivals in Britain/Scotland

The last bird in Britain prior to the influx was an adult at Pembroke Dock, Pembrokeshire on 22 March, while the first bird reported in Britain which was presumably part of this influx, was one in a garden at Suardal, two miles SW of Broadford, Isle of Skye, Highland on 9 May (subsequent sightings in this article are believed to relate to adults unless stated otherwise). It was then nearly two weeks until the next: one at Castle Island, Northumberland on 17 May, then one at Ashington, Northumberland on 18th–19th, followed by one at Geary, Isle of Skye on 22nd. Eleven more arrived in the next five days, widely distributed between Flamborough, Yorkshire, Anglesey, NW Wales, Bishopstone, Kent and Saltash, Cornwall, plus one at Waternish Point, Isle of Skye. A further ten

birds were found on 28–30 May, with seven on the south coast of England from the Isles of Scilly to Kent, one near Bridlington, Yorkshire and singles at Uig, Isle of Skye and on North Ronaldsay, Orkney both on 30th. On 31 May, four further birds were found in Scotland: singles at Hermaness, Unst, on Out Skerries, both Shetland (still present on 1 June), on Fair Isle, and on the Isle of May (remaining to 4 June).

Sightings in Scotland in early June

The start of June saw up to 17 birds found: one at Aird of Sleat, Isle of Skye on 1–2 June; one at Kinbrace, Highland on 1st; two on Fair Isle on 2nd, with three there on 4th; then singles at Drumbuie, Kyle of Lochalsh, Highland on 2nd; at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist, Outer Hebrides and at Bays of Harris, Harris, Outer Hebrides on 5th; at Clabhach, Coll, Argyll and at Hynish, Tiree, Argyll on 6th; at Milngavie, Clyde on 6–7th; at Bunessan, Mull, Argyll on 7th; two at Tugnet, Moray & Nairn on 7th; and singles at Forres, Moray & Nairn on 8th; on Out Skerries on 8–20th, and at Scatness, Mainland, Shetland on 10–12th June.

Remarkably, one ringed on Fair Isle on 3rd was found dead 892 km away in south-east Iceland on 15th. One has to assume that it continued on the same trajectory that took it to Fair Isle from south-eastern Europe.

Mid-June

In mid-June, 15 birds were reported: singles at Baliasta, Unst, Shetland on 11–13th; at Torridon, Highland on 11–12th; in Leven, Fife on 13–15th; one on Vatersay (OH) on 14–15th; another at Borve, Barra, Outer Hebrides on 17–28th; one at Gulberwick, Mainland, Shetland on

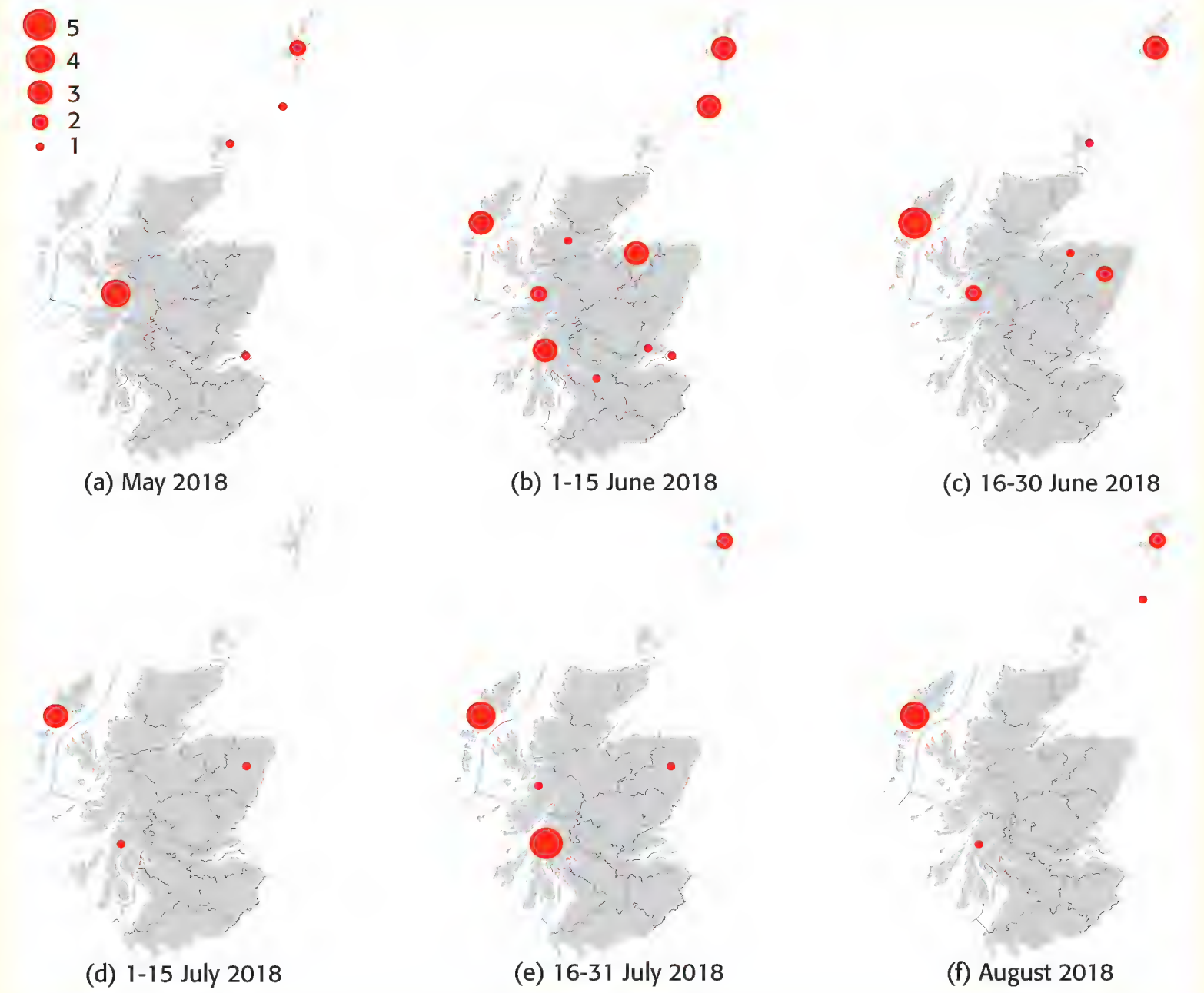

Figure 1. Rose-coloured Starling records in Scotland in 2018. Note the northern and western bias to records with comparatively few seen in well-watched eastern recording areas, and the reduction in sightings in early July before a rise later in the month.

16th; one at Kilmuir, Skye on 17–18th; one at Auchnagatt, North-east Scotland on 17–18th; one at the Bullers of Buchan/Cruden Bay, North-east Scotland on 19th, with two there from 22 June into July; then singles at Tarbert, Harris, Outer Hebrides on 17–21st; at Spean Bridge, Highland on 17–18th; at Cliff Beach, near Valtos, Lewis, Outer Hebrides on 18th; at Cloddach, Moray & Nairn on 18th, and at Malaclate, North Uist, Outer Hebrides on 19th.

Late June

In the latter part of June, seven singles were noted: at Sorisdale, Coll on 21–22nd; at Orphir, Mainland, Orkney on 24–27th; at Broadford, Skye again on 26th; at Callernish, Lewis, Outer Hebrides on 26–27th; at Baltasound, Unst, Shetland on 26th, and at Glenluce, Dumfries & Galloway and at Brough, Fetlar, Shetland on 28th.

First-half of July

Just five single adults were reported in the first half of July: one still at Bullers of Buchan to 10th; one still at Borve, Barra to 29th; one near Stornoway, Lewis, Outer Hebrides on 11th; at Ardnave, Islay, Argyll on 12–14th, and on the Isle of Grimsay, Outer Hebrides on 13–17th.

Plate 137. Rose-coloured Starling, Borve, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 18 July 2018. © *Bruce Taylor*

Second-half of July

Reports increased again in the latter half of July, with at least 12 noted: one at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 17th and two at Balephuil, Tiree on 23–24th, with one still on 25th, three on 27th, and one to 31st; and singles at Peterhead, North-east Scotland on 17th; at Scarp/Hushinish, Harris, Outer Hebrides on 18–27th; at Vatsetter, Yell, Shetland on 19–28th; at Leckuary, near Lochgilphead, Argyll on 23rd; on St Kilda, Outer Hebrides on 24th, with two there on 27th; and singles at Ardfern, Argyll on 26th; at Waternish Point/Geary, Skye again on 27–29th; at Houster, Mainland, Shetland on 27–31st, and one at North Tolsta, Lewis on 30th.

August

Numbers reduced again in August with just eight records: one was still on St Kilda on 1st, with two there on 2nd, and one still on 21st. Singles were still at Balephuil, Tiree on 2nd, and at Kenovay, Tiree on 17–25th; at Marvig, Lewis on 5th; at Stornoway, Lewis on 6–19th and on 29th; at South Nesting, Mainland, Shetland on 7th; on Fair Isle on 9–12th and at Skaw, Unst, Shetland on 27–28th.

September

Numbers reported dropped further in September, with only four birds noted: a single adult remaining on St Kilda to 15th; one still at Stornoway to 3rd, and one on Tiree to 5th. Finally, an adult was at Bonar Bridge, Highland on 26 September.

A juvenile at Barns Ness, Lothian from 21 September to 10 October was presumably part of a separate autumn movement which saw good numbers of first-year birds arrive in Britain from autumn up to the end of the year, including juveniles at South Dell, Lewis, Outer Hebrides on 19 October, at Annan, Dumfries & Galloway on 10–26 November, and at Montrose, Angus & Dundee on 20 November.

Discussion

Rose-coloured Starling has been increasingly recorded in Scotland, and was removed from the list of species assessed by SBRC from 1 January 2007, by which time 345 birds had occurred (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010). Records are now more difficult to analyse since then as they are no

longer published in a single location, but in the individual local bird reports. To a large extent, this problem is solved by the Online Scottish Bird Report (oSBR) facility on the SOC website. However, things become tricky again in the more recent years (2015 to date) where annual reports have not been published for several recording areas, and with 2017 the latest year covered by those reports which have. To overcome these issues, I have resorted to using records published on websites in some instances, and as such totals for these years are provisional and subject to change awaiting record submission and assessment by local records committees.

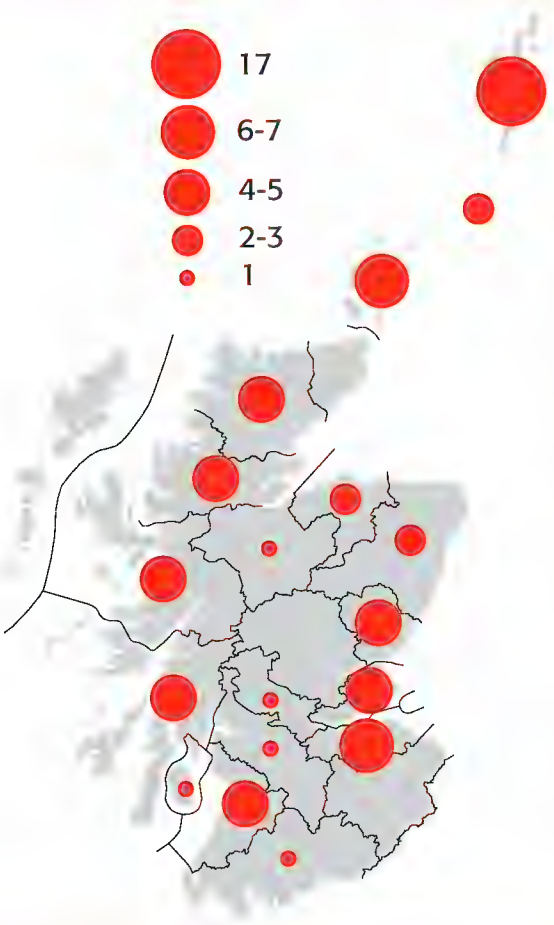

Figure 2. Rose-coloured Starling records in Scotland in summer 2012.

The largest ever influx of Rose-coloured Starlings into Scotland/Britain occurred in 2002, when at least 182 birds were recorded with 81 of these in Scotland. This dwarfed the previous best annual totals for the species in Britain - 66 in 2001 and 43 in 2000. These high totals were connected to an extension of the breeding range into South-east Europe from the late 1990s, and in 2002 this reached exceptional levels with up to 14,000 pairs in Romania. 2,000 pairs in Bulgaria and an additional 10,000 non-breeding individuals in Hungary (Fraser & Rogers 2004 and references therein).

Plate 138. Rose-coloured Starling, Isle of May, 3 June 2018. © *David Steel*

The species has continued to occur annually (the last blank year was 1978) with totals fluctuating between five (2007 and 2010) and about 26 (2008). The records conform to the pattern described in Forrester *et al.* (2007), where birds in spring and summer (almost all adults with a few first-summers) are believed to be overshoots from breeding populations - with sightings spread over the whole of Scotland, but most often in the north and west, and birds in autumn, (mostly juveniles), are reversed migrants with sightings mostly concentrated on the Northern Isles, and to a lesser extent northern Scotland and the east coast.

Following the 2002 influx, the annual totals dropped back to 14 in 2003, five in 2004, six in 2005, nine in 2006 and five in 2007.

2008 proved another influx year with at least 17 adults and three first-summer birds noted from 3 June (Uyeasound, Unst, Shetland) to early August, including eight on Orkney and at least three in Argyll. A smaller autumn arrival brought a further six birds from mid-August to late October.

There were six in 2009, with one on Shapinsay, Orkney present from 15 October to 23 December - the first record of over-wintering in Scotland (though the bird was apparently not in good condition and may not have been capable of moving elsewhere).

There were five in 2010, two summer adults in the west and three autumn juveniles on Orkney and Shetland.

At least 12 were found in 2011, with the latter including at least eight adults between 5 June and 7 August, including one far inland at Lochearnhead, Upper Forth on 9 June, and four juveniles between 25 September and 23 November.

There were seven birds in 2012, including the unusual record of a first-winter at Muirhead, Troon, Ayrshire from 28 January to 24 March - the first records for January and February and only the second over-wintering bird (but soon after the first).

In 2013, at least four birds were noted in June to July and a juvenile at Point Nis, Lewis, Outer Hebrides from 5th October to 11th November.

2014 saw another influx with at least seven in June, one in July and up to 12 between 1 September to 5 November, including birds in Argyll, Fife, Angus & Dundee and North-east Scotland as well as the Northern Isles.

2015 was less clear cut with up to eight in summer between 19 May (one at Ardivachar, South Uist, Outer Hebrides) and 4 August (a first-summer on Fair Isle), followed by four found during 10–21 August - adults on Harris, Outer Hebrides; Gairloch, Highland; and Loch Gorm, Islay, Argyll, and a juvenile at Peterhead, North-east Scotland. The Islay individual was refound at Kilchoman/Machir Bay on 7 September where it remained to 15 October, and an adult was at Stornoway, Lewis, Outer Hebrides on 6 September. Not the classic seasonal/age split of other years but more a wandering of adults already present and a single autumn arrival.

Plate 139. Rose-coloured Starling, Isle of May, 31 May 2018. This bird was sexed as a female due to its short crest length (25 mm) measured in the hand. © *Stuart Rivers*

By contrast, 2016 saw up to three adults from 16 June to 8 August (Grantown-on-Spey, Highland; Echt, North-east Scotland, and Mey, Highland) and at least six juveniles between 1 September and early November, with singles on Fair Isle, Shetland, Highland, the Outer Hebrides, one (possibly two) in Ayrshire and one in Borders.

There were up to 13 birds in 2017, starting with a male and a first-summer at Dunoon, Argyll from 25–30 May - a rare multiple occurrence, followed by eight from 3 June to 1 August, including an adult at Embo, Highland which was refound there on 28 August and seen to 3 September, another adult was at Fishtown of Usan, Angus & Dundee on 16 August and one was at Garths Ness, Mainland, Shetland on 8 October. Apart from the Fishtown bird, yet another notably northern and western distribution of records.

The influx of 2018 generated a complex pattern of records involving at least 45 birds before the prospect of birds wandering from one location to another precludes an exact calculation of numbers involved. Looking at totals from the different recording areas (as done in 2002) there were up to 11 on Shetland, four on Fair Isle, one on Orkney, up to 15 on the Outer Hebrides, up to 10 in Highland, four in Moray & Nairn, four in North-east Scotland, one in Fife, one on the Isle of May, up to seven in Argyll, one in Clyde and one in Dumfries & Galloway, giving a comparable total of up to 60 birds involved (though assigning close records to the same wandering individuals could bring that number down to nearer 50).

The distribution of records is very much biased to the north and west, with one on the Isle of May, possibly the same at Leven, Fife, four in North-east Scotland - at Auchnagatt, Bullers of Buchan (2) and Peterhead, and four in Moray & Nairn - at Tugnet (2), Forres and Cloddach, the only exceptions. This pattern is markedly different from that in 2002 when records were much more uniformly distributed around Scotland, and more closely correlates with the pattern seen in 2008. There were several records involving two or more birds together, including three on Fair Isle on 4 June and three together at Balephuill, Tiree, Argyll, on 27 July. The record site count in Scotland (Britain) remains the six at Gullane Bents, Lothian on 15 June 2002.

Summary

The influx of Rose-coloured Starlings in late spring/summer 2018 may have involved 50–55 individuals, and was different from the 2002 influx into Scotland in that the distribution of records was biased towards northern and western recording areas, and a smaller summer influx in 2008 involving up to 20 birds shares this bias. Rose-coloured Starling continues to be recorded in good numbers in Scotland with irruption influxes still a regular part of that pattern.

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Plate 140. Baltimore Oriole, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2018. © *Steve Duffield*

Baltimore Oriole, Morghan, Barra, 17–21 October 2018 – the second Outer Hebrides record

S.L. RIVERS

It is now 17 years since our 'team' started spending our autumn holidays birding on Barra. We log all our sightings, but the main focus of our visits is to try and find rare and scarce birds, and it has given us some great results, and while a large element of luck is involved in any find, being in a good location at that time of year definitely improves our chances. However, there is no getting round the fact that a lot of time and effort is spent searching sites and patches of cover, usually without reward. This year, most of us arrived on 29th September, with the first two weeks dominated by westerlies and often rain, and though there were relatively few migrants on the move we had seen a total of over 100 species, remarkably including a Daurian (Isabelline) Shrike, a Blyth's Reed Warbler and a Pechora Pipit - avian vagrancy is not always easy to rationalise!

The weather improved somewhat in my third week, still windy but less wet, and on Wednesday 17th I started walking north from our new base at Bolnabodach (our previous 'home', Sea Breezes at Bruernish was sold in spring 2017). I had checked the gardens of Croft 183 and of the first cottage, Aros, with nothing to show for it except the usual few Robins, Wrens, Blackbirds a Song Thrush and a Chaffinch. Next on my route was Morghan, and in particular Northbay House, often a trap for migrants. After nearly an hour (going round the garden three times) I had added a few Goldfinches, two Chiffchaffs, at least two Blackcaps and Goldcrests, 14 Redwings and a Fieldfare. Things

Plate 141. Baltimore Oriole, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2018. © *Brian Rabbitts*

Plate 142. Baltimore Oriole, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2018. © *Brian Rabbitts*

were looking up! Iain English arrived and after telling him what I'd seen, and that I would soon continue north, he drove south. I made one last check of the small orchard at the back - nothing new. I started to move off towards Northbay and the prospect of a couple of Yellow-browed Warblers at Aird Mhor plantation.

As I walked down the drive to leave I had one last look back, not something I normally do, but a very lucky decision. A bit distant, but gleaming in the sunshine was a fairly slim orange bird perched near the top of the Ash tree. A quick check that it wasn't a bright leaf - it turned its head, it could only be, and then panic set in.

Barra has a lot of mobile phone coverage blackspots and we have now all got cheap short-wave radios - great, except nobody was within range. I checked my Vodafone - no signal. Luckily the Orange network (somewhat appropriate) had been restored after being out of action for the first 12 days of our trip because of damage to the mast, and bars were starting to appear on that phone. Having sent out texts about Northern Oriole I looked up to see the bird had gone - classic schoolboy error, and I started to entertain lots of negative thoughts.

I decided it was best to stay on the drive and not risk flushing the bird by going back into the garden. It had not shown again by the time Iain and the other island birders arrived. We were waiting for Mark Oksien to shut down his nets at Creachan (of Scarlet Tanager fame) before trying to locate the bird again - it seemed a long wait. Bruce Taylor and Calum Scott had walked round the outside of the garden and had heard an unfamiliar short harsh rattling call a few times - on return they checked this with a recording on Ian Ricketts phone and were confident it was the Oriole. At least it was still probably present, some pressure off, but I was still desperate for others to see the bird, and indeed confirm it was actually a Baltimore Oriole.

Mark finally arrived and we slowly walked towards the Ash tree, which is surrounded by pines, while Iain checked out the small orchard. Within a minute the bird appeared briefly at the top of one of the pines, and most of us got a decent view, while remarkably Bruce got a photo - it was enough. I was so relieved it was not going to be a case of single observer sighting, and really started to enjoy the find - I was buzzing.

Over the next hour Iain, Mark, Kathy, Trish and Angie all caught up with it and we all had several more good views, but the bird was fairly elusive. Meanwhile Bruce had contacted the new owners of Northbay House, for whom he is the gardener, and got permission for us to put the news out. I did get to Aird Mhor for the Yellow-broweds - any day with one of them is a good day - but today they seemed even better.

Plate 143. Baltimore Oriole, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2018. © *Steve Duffield*

Most of the Hebs birders came for the bird (for some a third trip in two and a half weeks) which, though it visited the close-by Loch na Obe Cottage garden, was otherwise at Northbay House and stayed to 21 October but got rather more elusive. John Nadin, a friend of ours from Fife flew over (from Glasgow) to see it and managed to get some video footage of the bird (YouTube: https://youtu.be/EB2yq8yVmzk)

The striking plumage of the bird is shown well in the accompanying photographs, and the bird was aged /sexed as a first-year male based on the brightness of the orangey bits, and the lack of any black feathering on the head or back. Apart from the short chattering rattle, the bird was heard to give a couple of whistling notes (as used in its song) on the last couple of days by some observers. The bird showed very well at times, but was generally not showy, almost secretive in its habits. It was presumably feeding on insects and the apples in the small orchard but was also seen regularly taking nectar from fuchsia flowers.

I had always hoped to find a Baltimore Oriole on Barra and now it had happened! As if this wasn't enough, we have a "Guess the next Yank passerine on Barra" competition with everyone having two choices and the winner getting a beer from each of the other participants. I got eight bottles of beer!

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Plate 144. Baltimore Oriole, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2018. © *John Kemp*

Baltimore Oriole status in Scotland

This Nearctic species has a breeding range extending from easternmost British Columbia south-eastwards to NE Montana, through the Great Lakes east to Nova Scotia and south through central USA to NE Texas and Georgia. The population is almost entirely migratory, with the vast majority wintering from southern Mexico to NW South America, with very small numbers found lingering along the SE coast of the USA, and a few rarely on the California coast.

There have been 25 accepted records of Baltimore Oriole in Britain to the end of 2017, with five of those in Scotland:

***1890 Shetland**, first winter male, Baltasound, Unst, 26–28 September. (when died) 1st British record*
***1974 Fair Isle**, first-winter, 19–20 September*
***1988 Outer Hebrides**, female/immature, Benbecula. 30 September to 3 October [possibly since 22nd]*
***2007 Caithness**, adult male, Huna, near John O' Groats, 24–27 May*
***2013 Shetland**, first-winter, Baltasound, Unst, 19–23 September.*

In addition there have been two records in Ireland, both in Co. Cork in October 2001 and October 2006.

The great majority of records (72%) are from autumn with find dates between 19 September and 18 October, with three in spring (Cornwall, May 1968; Pembrokeshire, May 1970 and the Caithness bird in 2007), and four in winter (one dead in Warwickshire, December 1968; Pembrokeshire, 1989; Essex, 1991 and Oxfordshire, December 2003). It is possible that the winter records relate to birds which first arrived in Britain/Northern Europe in the previous autumn.

Outside Scotland there is a geographical bias in records towards SW England and Wales, with seven on the Isles of Scilly, two in Cornwall, three in Devon, three in Pembrokeshire, and singles in Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Sussex, Essex and on the Isle of Man.

Six birds have only been seen on the day of discovery, and most have lingered a week or less, but the three over-wintering birds have proven long stayers with the Oxfordshire bird in 2003 present for 38 days, the Essex bird in 1991 lingering for 114 days and the Pembrokeshire bird in 1989 seen for 143 days. A small number of records refer to birds attracted to feeders or fruit put out in gardens.

Plate 145. Lesser Yellowlegs, Teviot Haughs, Borders, October 2018. © *Dave Graham*

Lesser Yellowlegs, Teviot Haughs, 21–23 October 2018 – first record for Borders

S. TURNBULL

Sunday 21 October 2018 began with a dreich morning, the strong westerly gusts incorporating frequent wintery squalls of rain and hail. It felt cold and miserable, although there were a few brief sunny intervals. Nevertheless, I decided to take a walk on my local patch - Teviot Haughs. I walked downstream to Oxnam Burn, and not unusually, I located three Green Sandpipers along the River Teviot.

I walked upstream along Oxnam Burn before turning to walk along a hedgerow next to some flooded stubble fields, whereupon, at 10:43 hrs, I heard a very brief, quiet, wader call, apparently coming from the direction of the stubble. Whilst I recognised the call to be that of a wader, I wasn't able to identify the species from the call itself. I carefully looked through the hedge, and I saw a medium-sized, grey-coloured wader, reminiscent of a Redshank, although the overall impression and colour of the bird wasn't right for a Redshank. I was using 7 x 42 binoculars but didn't have my scope with me. Fortunately, the wader was less than 20 m away. It appeared confiding, and actually walked closer to me whilst feeding. I quickly saw the wader had distinctive yellow legs, with a slim appearance, slender neck and head. I was aware that it was likely to be either a Lesser or Greater Yellowlegs. I discounted the latter due to size alone. I began to put some notes into my notebook.

Within a couple of minutes of finding the wader, a severe hail squall passed through, and the bird flew off towards the nearby River Teviot. I followed the bird in flight and relocated it feeding on a gravel bed, in company with a Redshank and a Green Sandpiper. Fortunately,

the weather had improved and I was able to make size and colour comparisons. All three birds flushed together, and when the wader and the Green Sandpiper took off alongside each other, the white rumps of both birds gave a brief impression of two Green Sandpipers. However, the trailing yellow legs of the wader, and its much more slender shape plus colour differences created a distinct contrast with the Green Sandpiper.

I followed the wader as it flew back to the original flooded stubble, where I got excellent views of it. I was now sure it was a juvenile (1CY) Lesser Yellowlegs. Unfortunately, the weather got worse again and I also had to be elsewhere, and therefore I had to leave the bird. The angst of this becoming a potentially uncorroborated sighting of a rarity ran through my mind as I put the sighting onto the then recently introduced Borders Sightings WhatsApp Group and also the Borders Bird News site.

Fortunately, during the afternoon, other birders were able to able to catch up with the bird and also obtain some good photographs. The next day brought glorious sunshine and I returned early to the same flooded stubble, this time with my scope, and the wader was still in situ. I spent several hours enjoying a beautiful bird. It was a fantastic experience, particularly on my local patch.

Steve Turnbull, Borders
Email: lymnocryptes@yahoo.co.uk

Plate 146. Lesser Yellowlegs, Teviot Haughs, Borders, October 2018. © *Dave Graham*

Lesser Yellowlegs status in Scotland

This Nearctic species has a breeding range from Alaska eastwards in Canada through the southern Hudson Bay area to Newfoundland and south to southern British Columbia, the Great Lakes, southern Quebec and New Brunswick. It is entirely migratory, wintering in southern Florida, southernmost Texas through Central America and the Caribbean and throughout northern South America.

Lesser Yellowlegs is the fifth most regular Nearctic wader recorded in Britain with 391 accepted records to the end of 2017, with 68 of these in Scotland. Sightings are increasing with seven in the 1970s, and in the 1980s, 12 in the 1990s, 19 in the 2000s, and 19 from 2010 to 2017.

The distribution of records in Scotland shows a distinct north and west bias as would be expected from a Nearctic vagrant. with 11 on Shetland, three on Fair Isle, six on Orkney, 12 on the Outer Hebrides, one in Caithness, three in Highland, three in Moray & Nairn, eight in NE Scotland, eight in Argyll, one on Bute (Clyde Islands) and two in Ayrshire. In the heavily watched south-east of Scotland there have been just three in Angus & Dundee, one in Fife and four in Lothian.

The find dates for the Scottish records span from 1 January to 28 November, with one found in January, two in March, 14 in May one in June, five in July, six in August, 27 in September, eight in October and three in November. This equates to 57% of birds being found from late August to late November, with a distinct peak in the second half of September. Birds found at Loch Creran, Argyll on 3 March 1951 and at Cairnbulg, Fraserburgh, North-east Scotland, on 16 March to 24 April 1980 suggested overwintering may occur, while one present at Montrose Basin, Angus & Dundee from 10 November 2007 to 9 March 2008 was the first confirmed instance of this behaviour. A further winter record involves a 2cy bird at Cowton Rocks, North Berwick, Lothian on 1–4 January 2015. The most in a year is six in 1999, with five in 2005 and 2016, and though most only linger for a few days, several have stayed for longer with the 2007/08 bird at Montrose Basin present for 121 days and an adult was at Aberlady Bay, Lothian from 22 July to 20 December 2009 (152 days).

Plate 147. Ivory Gull at Hessilhead Wildlife Rescue Centre, Beith, Ayrshire, 2019. © *Bernie Zonfrillo*

Ivory Gull in the Firth of Clyde

H. DOUGLAS, G. CHRISTIE, B. ZONFRILLO & A. RUSSELL

Records of Ivory Gull in Scotland go back many years, to the early 1800s, but with fewer than 100 accepted records and with a world population of perhaps under 15,000 breeding pairs, it is undoubtedly a rare species. The breeding range is within the high Arctic with Spitzbergen (Svalbard) being the closest to Scotland.

On 23 January 2019, in the town of Stranraer at the base of Loch Ryan, in Dumfries & Galloway, a ghostly gull, an Ivory Gull to be precise, was found in a garden, and was clearly not very well, lying still for several hours. That evening it was taken to Hessilhead Wildlife Rescue Centre in Beith, Ayrshire, where its weight was noted at 380 g.

Since a previous example of Ivory Gull in 2007 had died from a gapeworm infestation, Gay and Andy Christie quickly treated the bird with worming medicine and suitable antibiotics. This had an immediate effect and the bird was soon eating the whitebait provided. It is a species that perhaps eats at infrequent intervals in the high Arctic, and with a correspondingly fluctuating weight. In captivity, it started to gain weight rapidly, and by the time of its release weighed in at a very healthy 590 g.

After a few days spent in a spacious aviary, where the gull could fly around, it spent much time bathing and preening and had clearly made a full recovery. On 10 February, the Ivory Gull was ringed by Hayley Douglas, of the Clyde Ringing Group and a lettered Darvic ring fitted in order that any possible future sightings could be reported. On holding the bird for ringing operations, it was noted that the bird had a strong bite for its size and that the one call that it made was a "keerweeoh", much more like a Sandwich Tern than any other species of gull. A short video clip of the ringing operations was made by Tommy Daniels, and the bird was then returned to its aviary. Measurements of head and bill suggested it was a male. Since strong westerly winds had been blowing, the release, at Stevenston Point in Ayrshire, was delayed

until the following day, 11 February 2019: the welfare of the bird taking priority. Fortunately, winds had turned southerly and were much lighter on 11th.

The following eye-witness description is by young enthusiast, Andrew Russell:
About 130 birders had gathered by 13:00 in the bright sunshine awaiting the arrival of the Hessilhead Rescue Centre van. It was a strange 'twitch' atmosphere, with no nervous energy around the site and everyone pretty relaxed, having travelled from far and wide to see the Arctic wanderer, but knowing they would definitely see their target bird. Once the rescue centre van arrived, you could feel the excitement around the crowd assembled at the Point. Everyone was about to see one of the most stunning visitors to Scotland in its less regularly observed adult plumage.

Eventually the long-anticipated box was brought out and two short speeches were made as everyone gathered round. Andy Christie then opened the box and there was a real buzz from the assembled crowd as the bird flew out and landed just 5 m away. It looked to be in great condition with pristine plumage, other than slightly worn wing tips. It spent around 30 seconds looking at the admiring crowd before flying strongly north and doing a few loops around Saltcoats' east shore before attempting to land on the beach where many gulls were already gathered. The crowd watched as it was relentlessly chased by Herring, Lesser Black-backed, Common and Black-headed Gulls. Eventually, the Ivory Gull had enough and headed north, last seen flying away over Saltcoats.

This Ivory Gull was only the second ever ringed in the UK. The first had been caught, coincidentally also in the garden - the garden of Robert and Stuart Rae's parents in Westhill, Aberdeen. The brothers had been ringing Common Gulls and, amazingly, they attracted a juvenile Ivory Gull to the bait. It was caught on the morning of 29 December 1976, its arrival following an overnight northerly blizzard and 150 mm of snow. It weighed 460 g. After release, this young bird hung around the general area for another week before vanishing with the thawing conditions.

Thanks to all at Hessilhead for a superb job well done, and to Rab Rae for his notes on the Aberdeen encounter.

Hayley Douglas, Gay Christie, Bernie Zonfrillo & Andrew Russell

Plate 148. Gathering crowd at Stevenston Point, February 2019. © *Andrew Russell*

Plate 149. The release, Stevenston Point, Ayrshire, February 2019. © *Andrew Russell*

Plate 150. Ivory Gull, Stevenston Point, Ayrshire, February 2019. © *Andrew Russell*

Ivory Gull status in Scotland

This rare high Arctic species has an almost circumpolar breeding range from the Parry Islands of Canada eastwards through northern Greenland, Svalbard, Franz Josef Land, Novaya Zemlya, and Severnaya Zemlya to the New Siberian Islands. Birds disperse after breeding, with the winter range mainly along the edges of the pack ice and drift ice zones of the Arctic including Iceland, and the Barents Sea coasts of Norway, Finland and Russia.

There have been 141 accepted individuals in Britain to the end of 2017, with 99 (70%) of these in Scotland. As expected, the distribution of Scottish records is strongly biased to the north and west: 21 in Shetland, two on Fair Isle, 14 on Orkney, 11 in the Outer Hebrides, five in Caithness (six birds), 13 in Highland, one in Moray & Nairn, 11 in North-east Scotland (15 birds), two in Angus & Dundee, one in Fife, one in Perth & Kinross, one in Lothian, one in Borders, seven in Argyll, one in Clyde, one in Ayrshire and one in Dumfries & Galloway.

Virtually all records have been in winter, often after northerly gales, with 89% found between the end of October and mid-March, plus one in late March, four in April, two in May, singles in June and July, and two in September. The birds seen outside the 'winter' period are thought to be wandering non-breeders.

Plate 151. Ivory Gull flying free Stevenston Point, Ayrshire, February 2019. © *Michael Sinclair*

Plate 152. Spotted Sandpiper, Girdle Ness, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, 20 October 2018. © *Fran Sullivan*

Spotted Sandpiper, Aberdeen, 20 October 2018 – the second record for North-east Scotland

M. & F. SULLIVAN

Having returned from an uneventful trip to Fair Isle, I suggested to my wife that we have a walk around Girdle Ness to see if there might be any migrants still hanging on, in particular to see if there were any Yellow-browed Warblers to be found.

On arriving at the allotments, we walked down to the shore to check the large Sycamore which is a good 'migrant trap'. Along the shore, our attention was drawn to a small wader flying towards us which landed at the water's edge. My first reaction was that it was a late Common Sandpiper - the flight and wing-bar recalling this species. Most years records of this species end in mid-September, but October records do occur. Given the late date, we gave the bird a longer look, and had our suspicions that it was something more unusual. I continued to watch the bird for a while as Fran obtained some record shots with her Lumix bridge camera.

On the ground, the bird did not move like a Common Sandpiper. It walked in a low-slung almost creeping manner, with its legs bent. Common Sandpipers in our experience usually move in a more upright manner, 'bobbing' as they move. The bird in question was not seen to 'bob' (although I have seen adults do this in the USA), instead, it kept low and scurried between the boulders on the shore. It immediately stood out as something different.

Description

- Structurally, the bird was obviously short-tailed - the primaries cloaking the tail, at most, the tail extended just a few mm beyond the wings. This gave the bird a different profile to that of a Common Sandpiper.
- The leg colour was also markedly different to that of a Common Sandpiper - being a fairly bright yellow colour, rather than the green-grey I would expect for this species. The pale off-pink bill, with an obvious dark tip, was also different to that of a Common Sandpiper.
- The bird had a strong white eye-ring, and the right side of the face showed a strong white supercilium, flaring behind the eye. Interestingly, this was not obvious on the left side of the face.
- Plumage on the head and back was an overall greyish brown colour, the underparts being a pure white. The breast sides were marked by neat grey/brown patches, with a white throat and upper breast. The most obvious plumage feature was the strong barring (with cream and darker brown) on the lesser and median coverts, while the greater coverts were only barred at the tips. This created a large obvious pale patch. Close examination of the photographs showed that the tertials were plain, with a small amount of barring on the very tips. This is unlike the pattern seen on juvenile Common Sandpiper, where the tertial fringes show fine barring.
- The bird did not call, even in flight.

The bird was determined to be a juvenile, based on the strong barring of the lesser and median coverts.

As soon as we could, we posted some photos to both Mark Lewis (who was about to board a ferry from Ouessant, France) and Paul Baxter (who was at a football match in Edinburgh), both of whom confirmed our identification, and it was put out on our local (ABZ-rare birds) grapevine. Unfortunately, however, the bird was not subsequently re-found.

Mark & Frances Sullivan, 29 Earlswells Road, Cults, Aberdeen AB15 9NY.
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Plate 153. Spotted Sandpiper, Girdle Ness, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, 20 October 2018. © *Fran Sullivan*

Scottish Bird Sightings

1 January to 31 March 2019

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

The species order is that of the IOC World Birdlist as adopted by BOU on 1 January 2018.

There was a decent showing by the usual Nearctic wildfowl but it was a relatively quiet start to the year. This ended abruptly with the discovery of a 'twitchable' Tengmalm's Owl on Shetland, with an over-wintering Common Rosefinch also on Shetland.

Taiga Bean Goose: the regular Slamannan flock (Clyde/UF) was present to mid-February at least, with peak counts of 120 on 1 January and 103 on 12 February. Elsewhere two were still at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) to 6 January, with 15 there on 7th, one on 8th, three on 12th, two on 13th, and one on 17 January, two again on 18–27 February, three on 3 March, and two to 10 March; one was at Halkirk High) on 19 February, with two there on 21–24 February and one to 19 March, and one at St John's Loch (Caith) on 25 February to 12 March, with two there on 3–12 March.. **Tundra Bean Goose:** one was still at Glencaple/Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) to 2 January; one still on Fair Isle to 21 January; three were at Muness, Unst (Shet) from 1–9 January; two at Baltasound, Unst from 17 January to 1 March, with one still to 15 March; two at Bigton/Ireland, Mainland (Shet) from 2–17 February; two at Rerwick , Mainland (Shet) on 4 February; three at Uyeasound, Unst on 11–21 February; at least one at Harpsdale, near Halkirk (High) on 19–21 February, and two at Cunningsburgh/Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) from 22 February to 8 March. **(Lesser) Snow Goose:** a blue-morph bird was still at Loch of Skene (NES) to 9 January, and again on 23 January and 3 February, with presumed same near Blackburn (NES) on 5 February; an intermediate morph still at Munlochy Bay (High) to 22 February, and an intermediate morph was at Kemnay (NES) on 10 January. **Canada Goose (vagrant forms)** ***interior*** - one was still at Caolas, Tiree (Arg) to 22 January; one was near Slamannan (UF) on 12 January; one was at Leorin/Port Ellen/Cornabus, Islay (Arg) from 5 February to 26 March, and two at Harpsdale, near Halkirk (High) from 24 February to 19 March; ***parvipes*** - one was at Borve/Allathasdal, Barra (OH) throughout. **Cackling Goose (*hutchinsii*):** one was still at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) to 19 March, one near Bridgend, Islay (Arg) on 4–28 February, and one near Port Charlotte, Islay on 15 February. **Bewick's Swan:** two were still at Loch of Clumlie, near Boddam, Mainland (Shet) to 15 February, and one again at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 13–18 January. **Egyptian Goose:** one flew north past Torness (Loth) and was then at Seafield Pond, Dunbar (Loth) before flying off NNE on 30 March.

Garganey: a drake flew north past Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 30 March. **Blue-winged Teal:** a drake was at Mellon Charles, near Aultbea (High) from 18 March into April. **American Wigeon:** single drakes were still near Tain/Loch Eye (High) to 14 March; one still at Loch Watten (Caith) to 2 February; one still at Loch Aileodair, North Uist (OH) to 4 January, and one at Loch Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 4–5 January. **Black Duck:** the regular drake was present at Strontian (High) from 18 February. **Green-winged Teal:** single drakes were still at North Ronaldsay (Ork) throughout; at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) throughout; still at Culswick Marsh, Mainland (Shet) to 9 January; at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) still to 17 January; at Tain Links (High) still to 5 February; at Loch Flemington (High/M&N) still to 14 March; at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) from 2 January to 27 March; at Alturlie Point (High) on 18 January; at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) from 30 January to 4 February; at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) from 8 February to 13 March; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) from 10 February into April; at Coot Loch, Benbecula (OH) on 17–23 February; at Auchlossan (NES) on 23–24 February; at Port Charlotte, Islay (Arg) on 2nd and

20 March; at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 8–21 March; at Crook of Baldoon RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 19th; one near Halkirk (High) on 24th, and at Mersehead RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 25–28th. **Ring-necked Duck:** adult drakes were still at Acharacle, Loch Shiel (High) to 10 January; at Loch Watten (Caith) to 2 February; on Coot Loch, Benbecula (OH) to 4 February; a male, a female and immature male were at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree to 5 March, a female still at St John's Loch (Caith) to 19 March; a drake was at Loch Fada, Benbecula (OH) from 20 January to 17 February; one at North Couston Quarry, Torphichen (Loth) on 21–22 January; one at Little Loch Shin, Lairg (High) on 8–12 February, and one at Loch of Skene (NES) on 20–21 February. **Lesser Scaup**: a first-winter drake was at the south shore of Loch Ryan (D&G) from 8–30 January.

King Eider: a drake was at Nairn Bar, Nairn (M&N) on 31 March. **Surf Scoter:** a single drake was still off Musselburgh/Joppa (Loth) throughout; two drakes were still off West Sands, St. Andrews (Fife) to 20 February; a drake off Gullane Point/Aberlady Bay from 2 January to 11 February; two drakes were off Quanterness, Mainland (Ork) on 2–3 January, and three drakes and a female were again in the Sound of Taransay, Harris (OH) off Luskentyre on 10 February. **Smew:** single redheads were at Loch of Skene (NES) from 2018 to 1 January; two were still at Cameron Reservoir (Fife) from 2018 to 23 February, with three on 8 January, and one still to 17 March; a redhead at Lochore Meadows CP (Fife) from 2018 to 18 March; one at Loch Watten (Caith) on 14 January to 16 February, with two there on 18 January; one at Loch of Benston, Mainland (Shet) on 18 January; one at Vassa Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 18–20 January; one at Loch Scarmclate (Caith) on 18 January; one at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) on 25 January; a drake was again on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 27 January to 5 March; a redhead at Martnaham Loch (Ayrs) from 2 February to 14 March; at Loch of Skene again from 7–24 February and 23 March; off Musselburgh (Loth) on 7 February; at the Hirsel CP, Coldstream (Bord) on 15–17 February; at North Loch, Sanday (Ork) on 16 February, and one at Barnshean Loch (Ayrs) on 24 March.

White-billed Diver: an adult was still off Kirkabister, Mainland (Shet) to 4 January, and again on 1–2 March; an adult was off Cleatt, Barra (OH) on 1 January; one flew past Corsewall Point (D&G) on 1 January; at least five were off Papa Westray (Ork) on 2 January, with two there still on 24 February and one on 4–21 March, then six on 31 March; an adult again off Eoligarry jetty from 4 January to 28 February; two off Scrabster (Caith) on 4 January; one off Aird Mhor ferry terminal, Barra again from 5 January to 4 March; one off Housabister, Mainland (Shet) from 9 January to 28 February; one in Bluemull Sound, near Uyea Isle (Shet) on 11 January and 28 February; one off Ardessie, Little Loch Broom (High) on 14 January; one flew past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22 January; a first-winter was at Skelda Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 2–3 February; one off South Nesting, Mainland (Shet) on 4th and 16 March; at least three were off Portsoy (NES) on 5 March, with two still on 31st; one was off Castlehill, Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 26th, and one off Camusnagaul, Little Loch Broom on 31 March. **Pied-billed Grebe:** the returning bird was still at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) from 2018 into April, and the male was again at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) from 20 February into April. **Black-necked Grebe:** overwintering birds included two still at Musselburgh (Loth) from 2018 to 20 January, with one to 14 February, then two again to 2 March; one still at Elie Ness (Fife) from 2018 to 31 March; one at White Sands Quarry, Dunbar (Loth) on 2 February; two Gosford Bay (Loth) on 5 February, one still on 10 February, and two off Prestonpans (Loth) on 24th.

Glossy Ibis: one flew over the A90/A926 junction, near Forfar on 10 January. **Bittern:** one was again at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 11 January to 16 February; one at Castle Loch NR (D&G) on 16 January, and one at Glencorse Reservoir, Pentland Hills (Loth) on 11–12 February. **Great**

Plate 154. Bittern, Glencorse Reservoir, Lothian, February 2019. © *Mike Thrower*

White Egret: singles were still at Lees Haugh, Coldstream (Bord) from 2018 to 27 February, and then at the Hirsel CP, Coldstream from at least 21 March, with two there on 20 January; one at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) from 10 February; one at Town Yetholm (Bord) on 22 February; one at Kincardine Bridge (UF) on 3 March, and one at Loch of Mey (Caith) on 28–29 March. **Little Egret:** generally under-reported, but away from the Solway stronghold there were still singles on North and South Uist (OH) and Orkney in the period and up to four at Aberlady Bay (Loth).

Osprey: one at Loch Melldalloch, Cowal on 26 February was the earliest ever record for Argyll. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was at Dounby, Mainland (Ork) on 18–19 March. **Crane:** the first-winter was still at Lees Haugh/Coldstream (Bord) to 17 February and on 23 March, and nearby at Birgham/Redden Haugh (Bord) on 8–21st and 27 March; two flew over the Isle of May on 25 March - second island record; one was near Loch of Hempriggs (Caith) on 29th, one at Newtonhill near Wick (Caith) on 30th and three flew over Tyninghame (Loth) on 31 March. **Grey Phalarope:** one was at Thurso (Caith) on 25 March.

Ivory Gull: an emaciated adult at Stranraer (D&G) on 23 January was taken into care, and released at Stevenston Point (Ayrs) on 11 February. **Mediterranean Gull:** few reported away from the Firth of Forth, but an adult was near Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 23 February and at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 27 February. **Ring-billed Gull:** an adult was still at Strathclyde CP, Motherwell (Clyde) from 2018 to 23 February; a second-winter was at Loch A' Phuill/Sandaig, Tiree (Arg) still to 12 February, and an adult was at Fisherrow/Eastfield (Loth) on 17 February and 3 March.

Glaucous Gull: numbers increased from December with over 55 in January, from Shetland to Lothian and Islay (Arg), mostly singles but with higher counts of 15 at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 20th, with five there on 14th, and five on Fair Isle on 8th and at Burrafirth, Unst on 20th. In February, over 35 were noted, from Shetland to Lothian and Clyde, mostly singles but with higher counts of two at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 1–6th and 26th, at Tiumpan Head, Lewis (OH) on 3rd, at Castlehill, Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 10th, on Eday (Ork) on 11th, and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12th. At least 24 in March, from Shetland to Lothian and Clyde, mostly singles but with higher counts of two at Norwick, Unst on 20th, on Fair Isle and at Haroldswick, Unst on 22nd, and at Rubha Arnal, North Uist on 23rd. **Iceland Gull:** increased in numbers c.f. December 2018 - over 45 in January from Shetland to Lothian and Clyde, mostly singles but with four on Eday (Ork) on 2nd and three at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 8th. Over 40 in February, from Shetland to Lothian and Ayrshire, mostly ones and twos, but with higher counts of five at Lerwick/Gremista, Mainland (Shet) on 21–24th, and four at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) on 23rd. Over 40 still in March from Shetland to Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway, mostly singles, but with higher counts of two at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 1–3rd, at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 5th, at Tiumpan Head, Lewis (OH) on 17th, at Haroldswick, Unst on 22nd, and at Quanterness, Mainland (Ork) on 31st. **Kumlien's Gull:** an adult was at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 13–30 January; an adult at Burwick, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 February; a second-winter at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 20 February; a first-winter on the Isle of May on 20 February - first record for the island; a near adult was at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 25 February to 1 March; an adult was at Bewan, North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20 March, and an adult at Uisaed Point, Kintyre (Arg) on 21 March.

Turtle Dove: over-wintering singles were at Kirkcowan (D&G) on 26–31 January, and at Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 1–3 February. **Snowy Owl:** the male was still on Eday (Ork) from 2018 into April, one at Ronas Hill, Mainland (Shet) on 28 February and again on 14 March, and one at Mangaster, Mainland (Shet) on 16 March. **Tengmalm's Owl:** one was near Bixter, Mainland from 19–23 February, then nearby at Lea Gardens, Tresta, Mainland (Shet) on 25 February to 2 March.

Great Grey Shrike: singles were near Nethybridge (High) on 6–15 February, and again on 25 March, and still near Refouble, Lochindorb (High) on 16 February to 11 March. **Waxwing:** numbers had reduced markedly from the December total, but still over 930 noted in January, from Highland to Borders, including high counts of 150 at Pilrig Park, Edinburgh (Loth) on 1st, with 140 still on 3rd, 100 at Craigleith, Edinburgh on 11th, and 70 at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh on 4th. The only record from the west was of 10 in Glasgow (Clyde) on 23 January. In February over 560 were reported, from Highland to Lothian, with higher counts of 140 at Saughton, Edinburgh on 7th, 40 at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh on 1st, 40 at Tomatin (High) on 5–6th, and 30 at Elgin (M&N) on 2nd. There were also 22 in Falkirk (UF) on 6 February. In March, there were over 350 birds seen, from Highland to Borders, including higher counts of 30 at Newport-on-Tay (Fife) on 22nd, 26 at Sighthill, Edinburgh (Loth) on 2nd and 26 at Longforgan (P&K) on 10th.

Plate 155. Shore Lark, Kilspindie, Aberlady Bay, Lothian, January 2019. © *Mark Wilkinson*

Shore Lark: two were still at Kilspindie, Aberlady Bay (Loth) from 2018 to 4 March; two at John Muir CP, Dunbar (Loth) from 2018 to 17 February; one at Nairn (M&N) on 23 February, and three at Rattray Head (NES) from 2–10 March. **Sand Martin:** one over Portnahaven, Islay, on 27 February was the earliest ever in Argyll. **Firecrest:** a singing male was at Red Burn, Glen Feshie (High) on 26 February. **Water Pipit:** singles were at Troon (Ayrs) from 2018 to 1 March, with two on 15–17th and 29 January to 6 February; at Largo Bay (Fife) still from 2018 to 21 February, with two present on 2 January; at Lendalfoot (Ayrs) from 2018 to 2 February; one at Scoughall (Loth) from 2018 to 18 March, with four there on 2 March, and two still on 3rd; one at Skateraw from 2018 to 31 March, with two there on 2 February, and three on 2 March; one on Papa Westray (Ork) from 2018 to 3 January and 11–21 March; at Thorntonloch (Loth) on 3 January; at Seamill (Ayrs) on 4 January to 24 February, with two on 5–9 January and 1 February to 3 March; two at Torness (Loth) on 19 January to 17 February, with three on 2–5 February, and one to 21 February; at Dornoch (High) on 22 January to 7 February; at Machrie Bay, Isle of Arran (Ayrs) on 23 February to 24 March; at Ferny Ness (Loth) on 16–21 March; at Dumbarton (Clyde) on 24 March into April, and at Barns Ness (Loth) on 27 March, with two there on 28th.

Hawfinch: just singles at Cawdor (High) and at Scone Palace (P&K) reported in January, then at least 23 noted in February with at least 22 at Scone Palace, and one at Aigas Field Centre, Beauly (High) on 14th, then in March up to 24 were at Scone Palace and one at Carrbridge (High) on 2nd. **Common Rosefinch:** a juvenile was at Cunningsburgh, Mainland (Shet) from 6 January to 20 March. **Arctic Redpoll:** birds of the *exilipes* subspecies were at Hopes Reservoir (Loth) on 3–27 January, with two there on 4th and 17 January; one at Longformacus (Bord) on 6 January to 3 February, and at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) again on 13 January and 28 February to 3 March.

Lapland Bunting: the only report in the period was of a male at Sandar, North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30 March. **Snow Bunting:** a very good showing, mostly in the Northern and Western Isles, but with records south to Lothian and Ayrshire. Over 410 reported in January with high counts of 108 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31st, 50 at Quanterness, Mainland (Ork) on 2nd, 33 at Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 28th, 26 at Nairn (M&N) on 6th, and 25 at Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 6th. Well over 600 in February with high counts of 200 on the Malaclate machair, North Uist (OH) on 19th (winter highest count), 85 on North Ronaldsay on 10–13th, 55 at Birsayay (Ork) on 16th, 40 at Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 17th, and 37 at Eoligarry, Barra on 10th, and at Nairn on 23rd. Over 200 noted in March, with higher counts of 50 at Sollas, North Uist (OH) on 16th, and 36 on North Ronaldsay on 2nd.

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PhotoSP©T

Plate 156. This photograph was taken on 19 January 2019, on my iPhone, when I was out with my wife and daughter in Irvine's Rivergate Shopping Centre, Ayrshire.

I noticed this Rook calling from the signpost as shoppers were walking past. It seemed quite unperturbed when I first approached, but when I stopped to raise my arm and take a photo 1.5 m away, the Rook immediately took flight and this is the only image I obtained.

Camera settings were on automatic mode but the 12-megapixel sensor did a decent job in capturing the overall mood. I called the image 'Getting directions!' on social media and it got quite a few likes!

Equipement: Apple iPhone 6s, 4.15mm, Normal Program, ISO 25, 1/400 sec, f2.2.

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